



Fairy Gold

Christian Reid

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FAIRY GOLD

By CHRISTIAN REID

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Mary," "His Victory," etc.*



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FAIRY GOLD

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PRELUDE.

CLAIRE! do stop that tiresome practicing and come here. Helen and I want you.”

The voice was very clear and vibrating, and had a ring of command in it as it uttered these words; while the summer dusk was dying away, and the summer air came soft and sweet into the school-room of a convent, that, from the eminence on which it stood, overlooked a city at its feet, and the rise and fall of Atlantic tides. It was drawing toward the close of the exercise-hour, but the two girls who stood together in school-girl fashion beside an open window, and the third, who in an adjoining music-room was diligently practicing Chopin, were not the only ones who had neglected its observance and incurred no rebuke; for was not to-morrow the end of the scholastic year, and did not relaxation of rules already reign from dormitory to class-room?

Many hearts were beating high at the thought of the freedom which that morrow would bring; many

dreams were woven of the bright world which lay beyond these quiet shades; of pleasures which were to replace the monotonous round of occupation in which youth had so far been spent — the round of lessons from teachers whose voices were gentle as their faces were holy and serene; of quiet meditations in the beautiful chapel, with its sculptured altar and stained-glass windows and never-dying lamp; of walks in the green old garden, and romps along its far-stretching alleys. They were ready to leave it all behind, these careless birds, eager to try their new-fledged wings; and when the heat and burden of the day should come down upon them, how much they would give for one hour of the old quiet peace, the old happy ignorance!

And among them all no face was more bright with triumphant hope — or was it triumphant resolve? — than hers whose voice went ringing through the almost deserted school-room, in the half-entreaty, half-command recorded above.

The sound of the piano ceased on the instant; a slight rustling followed, as of music being put away; and then a girl came down the middle aisle of desks, toward the window which overlooked the garden and faced the glowing western sky, where the two girls were standing, both of whom turned as she advanced.

“You must pardon me,” she said, in a tone of apology. “I did not mean to stay so long, but I forget myself when I am at the piano, and I could scarcely bear to think that this was my last hour of practice.”

“I am quite sure that it will not be your last hour of practice,” said the girl who had spoken first.

“You are too fond of drudgery for that. But how can you talk of not bearing to think of its being the last *here*, when Helen and I have been congratulating each other on the fact until we exhausted all our expressions of pleasure, and had to call on you to help us?”

“Then you would have done better to let me finish my practicing,” said the other, with a faint smile; “for I cannot help you with one expression of pleasure: I am too sorry.”

“Sorry!”—it was the one called Helen who broke in here. “Oh! how can you say that, when we are going home to be so happy?”

“*You* are going home, dear,” remarked Claire, gently.

“And are not you? Is not my home your home, and will I not be hurt if you do not feel it so?”

“You are very kind, dear,” said Claire; “but you cannot give me what God has denied. Perhaps I too might be glad of to-morrow, Helen, if I had your future or Marion’s courage; but, lacking both, I only feel afraid and sad. I feel as if I should like to stay here forever—as if I were being pushed out into a world with which I am not able to cope.”

“But a world which shall never harm you so long as my love and Marion’s courage can help you,” said Helen, as she passed her disengaged arm around the slender form. “You know we three are pledged to stand together as long as we live; are we not, Marion?”

“I know that Claire is very foolish,” answered Marion. “If I had her talent I should be eager to go into the world—eager to cope with and overcome

it. Everyone says that she is certain to succeed, and of all the gifts in the world fame must be the sweetest."

"I suppose it is," said Claire; "but I know enough of art—just enough—to be aware that it is a long journey before one can even dream of fame. I love to paint—oh! yes, better than anything else,—but I know what difficult work lies before me in becoming an artist."

"Yet you do not mind work," observed Helen, in a wondering tone.

"No," answered the other, "not here, where I had help and encouragement and the sense of safe shelter. But out in the world, where I shall have only myself to look to, and no one to care whether I fail or not—well, I confess my courage ebbs as I think of that."

"How strange!" said Marion. "If my hands were as free as yours are, I should like nothing better than for them to be as empty—if you can call hands empty that have such a power."

"And are not your hands as free as mine?" asked the other. "We are both orphans, and both—"

"Poor," said Marion, frankly. "Yes, but with a difference. Most people, I suppose, would think the difference in my favor; I think it is in yours. You have no family obligations to prevent your doing what you will with your life, from following the bent of your genius; while I—well, it is true I have no genius, but if I had it would be all the same. My uncle would never consent to my doing anything to lower the family dignity, and I owe him enough to make me feel bound to respect his wishes."

"It is well to have some one whose wishes one is bound to respect," said Claire gently, and then a silence fell.

They were decided contrasts, these three girls, as they stood together by the open window, and looked out on the bright sunset and down into the large garden;—decided contrasts, yet all possessed in greater or less degree the gift of beauty.

It was certainly in greater degree with Marion Lynde, whose daily expanding loveliness had been the marvel of all who saw her for two years past;—the marvel even in this quiet convent, where human aspect was perhaps of less account than anywhere else on all God's earth. The little children had looked with admiration on her brilliant face, the older girls had gazed on it with throbs of unconscious envy; the nuns had glanced pityingly at the girl who bore so proudly that often fatal dower; and many times the Mother Superior had sent up a special prayer for this defiant soldier of life, when she saw her kneeling at Mass or Benediction with a many-tinted glory streaming over her head.

As she stood now in her simple school dress, Marion was a picture of striking beauty. Tall, slight, graceful, there was in her grace something imperial and unlike other women. Her white skin, finely grained and colorless as the petal of a lily, suited the regular, clear-cut features; while her eyes were large and dark—splendid eyes, which seemed to carry lustre in their sweeping glance,—and her hair was a mass of red gold. Altogether a face to study with a sense of artistic pleasure,—a face to admire as one admires a statue or a painting; but not a face that attracted or

wakened love, as many less beautiful faces do, or as that of her cousin, Helen Morley, did.

For everyone loved Helen — a winsome creature, with lips that seemed formed only for smiles, and hands ever ready to caress and aid; with endearing ways that the hardest heart could not have resisted, and a heaven-born capacity for loving that seemed inexhaustible. It was impossible to look on the bright young face and think that sorrow could ever darken it, or that tears would ever dim the clear violet of those joyous eyes. From the Mother Superior down to the youngest scholar, all loved the girl, and all recognized how entirely she seemed marked out for happy destinies. “You must not let the brightness of this world veil Heaven from your sight, my child,” the nuns would say, as they laid their hands on the silken-soft head, and longed to hold back from the turmoil of life this white dove, whose wings were already spread for flight from the quiet haven where they had been folded for a time.

Least beautiful of the three girls was Claire Alford,— a girl whose reserved manner had perhaps kept love as well as familiarity at bay during the years of her convent tutelage. Even Marion, with all her haughty waywardness, had more friends than this quiet student. Yet no one could find fault with Claire. She was always considerate and gentle, quick to oblige and slow to take offense. But she lived a life absorbed within itself, and those around her felt this. They felt that her eyes were fixed on some distant goal, to which every thought of her mind and effort of her nature was directed.

The only child and orphan of a struggling artist —

a man of genius, but who died before he conquered the recognition of the world.— Claire knew that her slender fortune would hardly suffice for the expenses of her education, and that afterward she must look for aid to herself alone. Usually life goes hard with a woman under such circumstances as these. But Claire had one power as a weapon with which to fight her way. Her talent for painting had been the astonishment of all her teachers, and it was a settled thing that she would make art the object and pursuit of her life. If least beautiful of the three girls who stood there together, an observant glance might have lingered longest on her. There was something very attractive in the gray eyes that gazed so steadily from under their long lashes, and in the smile that stirred now and then the usually grave and gentle lips.

It only remains to be added that both Claire and Helen were Catholics, while Marion had been brought up in Protestantism, which resulted, in her case, in absolute religious indifference.

The silence had lasted for some time, when Helen's voice at last broke it, saying:—

“ You are right, Claire. It does make one sad to think that we are standing together for the last time in our dear old school-room. We have been so happy here! I wonder if we shall be *very* much more happy out in the world? ”

“ I doubt if we shall ever be half as happy again, ” answered Claire.

“ Oh, you prophet of evil! Why not? ”

“ Why not, Helen! ” repeated Claire. “ Because I doubt if we shall ever again feel so entirely at peace with ourselves and with others as we have felt here. ”

"It is a very nice place," observed Helen; "and I love the Mother Superior and all the Sisters dearly. But, then, of course, I want to see mamma and Harry and little Jock. I want to ride Brown Bess again, and I do want to go to a party Claire."

"Well," said Claire, smiling, "I suppose there is no doubt that you will go to a good many parties, and I hope you will enjoy them."

"There is no doubt of her enjoyment," interposed Marion, speaking in her usual half satiric tone, "if Paul Rathborne is to be there."

"I was not thinking of Paul Rathborne, and neither, I am sure, was Helen," said Claire.

"That is likely!" cried Marion, laughing. "Don't, Helen! I would not tell a story to oblige Claire, if I were you."

But Helen had apparently little idea of telling the story. Even in the dusk, the flush that overspread her face was visible, and the lids drooped over the violet eyes.

"At all events, we will not talk of him," said Claire, decidedly. "We will talk of ourselves and our own futures. We are standing on the threshold of a new life, and surely we may spare a little time in wondering how it will fare with us. Marion, what do you say?"

"If one may judge the future by the past, I should say, so far as I am concerned, badly enough," Marion replied. "But whether I alter matters for better or for worse, I don't mean to go on in the same old way; I shall change the road, if I don't mend it."

"Change it in what manner?"

"I don't know exactly. Circumstances will have

to decide that for me. But I don't mean to go back to my uncle's, to share the family economic, and hear the family complaints, and wear Adela's old dresses; you may be sure of that, Claire!"

"But how can you avoid it," asked Claire. "when you have just said that you will not disregard your uncle's wishes by attempting to support yourself?"

"I shall not do anything to hurt the Lynde pride," answered the girl, mockingly. "I shall only take my gifts of body and mind into the world, and see what I can make of them."

"Make of them!" repeated Helen. "In what way?"

"There is only one way that I care about," returned the other, carelessly: "the way of a fortune."

"Oh! I understand: you mean to marry a rich man."

"I mean that only as a last resort. The world would think worse of me if I robbed a man of his fortune; but I should think worse of myself, and wrong him more, if I married him to obtain it. No, Helen, I shall not do that—if I can help it."

"But you would not be wronging him, Marion, if you loved him."

"And do you think," demanded the young cynic, "that one is likely to love the man it is best for one to marry?"

"Yes, I think so — I know so."

"Ah! well, perhaps it may be so to such a child of happy fate as you are, but it is never likely to occur to me."

"And is a fortune all that you mean to look for in life?" asked Helen.

“Why should I look for anything more? Does not that comprise everything? Ah! you have never known the bitterness of poverty, or you would not doubt that when one has fortune, one has all that is necessary for happiness.”

“But I have known poverty,” broke in Claire; “and I know, Marion, that there are many worse things in life than want of money, and many better things than possessing it.”

“That is all you know about the matter,” replied Marion, with an air of scorn. “Perhaps I, too, might be able to feel in that way, if I had known only the poverty that you have — a picturesque, Bohemian poverty, with no necessity to pretend to be what you were not. But genteel poverty, which must keep up appearances by a hundred makeshifts and embarrassments and meannesses — have you ever known *that*? It has been the experience of my life, — one which I shudder to recall, and which I would sooner die than go back to.”

“Poor darling! you shall not go back to it,” cried Helen.

But Marion threw off her caressing hand.

“Don’t, Helen!” she said, sharply. “I can’t bear pity, even from you. But I have talked enough of myself. You both know what I am going to do: to make a fortune by some means. Now it is your turn, Claire, to tell your ambition.”

“You know it very well,” answered Claire, quietly. “I am going to be an artist, and perhaps, if God helps me, to make a name.”

“Yes, I know,” said Marion, gloomily. “Yours is a noble ambition, and I think you will succeed.”

“ I hope so,” responded Claire, looking out on the sunset with her earnest eyes. “ At least I know that I have resolution and perseverance, and I used to hear my father say that with those things even mediocre talent could do much.”

“ And yours is not mediocre. Yet you talk of being sorry to leave here, with such a prospect before you.”

“ Such a battle, too. And people say that the world is very hard and stern to those who fight it single-handed.”

“ So much the better!” cried Marion, flinging back her head with an air of defiance. “ There will be so much the more glory in triumph.”

“ You never seem to think of failure,” observed Claire, with a smile. “ But now Helen must tell us what she desires her future to be.”

“ Mine?” said Helen. “ Oh! I leave all such things as fortune and fame to you and Marion. I mean only to be happy.”

“ To be happy!” repeated Marion. “ Well, I admire your modesty. You have set up for yourself a much more difficult aim than either Claire’s or my own. And how do you mean to be happy? That is the next question.”

“ I don’t know,” replied Helen, with a laugh. “ I just mean to go home to enjoy myself; that is all. And how happy it makes me to think that you are both going with me!”

“ Dear little Helen!” said Claire, caressingly. “ But it will not make you unhappy to hear that I am not going with you, will it? I have just found out that I can not go.”

“Not go!” repeated Helen. The deepest surprise and disappointment were written on her face. “O, Claire, it is impossible that you can mean it—that you can be so unkind! Why do you say such a thing?”

“I say it because it is true, dear; though it is a greater disappointment to me than to you. I have just had a letter from my guardian, telling me he has found an opportunity to send me abroad with a lady, an acquaintance of his own; and I have no choice but to go.”

“I should think you would be delighted to find such an opportunity,” said Marion. “But surely the lady is not going to Rome at this season?”

“No: she is going to Germany for the summer, and to Italy in the autumn; which is a very good thing, for I shall see the galleries of Dresden and Munich before I go to Rome. Of course I am glad—I must be glad—to find the opportunity at once; but I had promised myself the pleasure of a quiet, happy month with Helen and you, and I am sorry to lose it.”

“It is too bad,” said Helen, with a sound as of tears in her voice. “I had anticipated so much pleasure in our all three being together! And now—why could not your guardian have waited to find the lady, or why does she not put off going abroad until the autumn?”

“Why, in short, is not the whole scheme of things arranged with reference to one insignificant person called Claire Alford?” replied Claire, laughing. “No, dear; there is no help for it. I must give up the idea of a short rest before the combat.”

“And now there is no telling when we shall all be together again!” said Helen. “I could not have believed that such a disappointment was in store for me.”

“I hope you will never know a worse one,” remarked Claire. “But if we live, we must meet again some day. We are too good friends to suffer such trifles as time and space to separate us always.”

“But you are going so far away, one cannot tell when or where that meeting will be,” said Helen, still mournfully.

“Perhaps it may be when Marion has made her fortune, and asks us to visit her castle,” answered Claire. “Marion, have you formed any plans as to where it is to be situated? Marion, don’t you hear?”

“What is it?” asked Marion, starting. “I beg your pardon, but I was thinking. Did you say, Claire, that this visit, which you could not make, would have been a rest before the combat to you? I was wondering if it will be a rest to me or a beginning.”

She spoke half dreamily, and neither of the others answered. They only stood with the sunset glow falling on their fair young faces, their wistful gaze resting upon each other, and quite silent, until a bell pealed softly out on the twilight air, and their last school-day ended forever.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is nothing specially attractive about Scarborough — a town which nestles among green hills near the foot of the Blue Ridge,— except its salubrious and delightful climate, which has long drawn summer visitors from the lower malarial country ; but if it had been as beautiful as Naples or as far-famed as Venice, it could not have wakened more loving delight than that which shone in Helen Morley's eyes as she drew near it. For that deeply-rooted attachment to familiar scenes — to those aspects of nature on which the eyes first opened, and which to the child are like the face of another mother — was as strong in her as it is in most people of affectionate character. For several miles before the train reached Scarborough, she was calling Marion's attention to one familiar landmark after another ; and when finally they stopped at the station on the outskirts of the town, her eagerness knew no bounds.

“ Come, Marion ; here we are ! ” she cried, springing up hastily. But at that moment the car was burst open by a tall young man, who entered, followed by two small boys, upon all three of whom, as it seemed to Marion, Helen, with a glad little cry, precipitated herself. There were embraces, kisses, inquiries for

a moment; then the young man turned and held out his hand, saying, "This is Miss Lynde, I am sure?"

"Yes," said Helen, turning her flushed, smiling face. "And this is my cousin, Frank Morley, Marion. And here is my brother Harry, who has almost grown to be a man since I went away; and here is little Jock."

Marion shook hands with all these new acquaintances; the boys seized bags and baskets, and the young man led the way from the car and assisted them to the platform outside, near which a large open carriage was standing, with a broadly-smiling ebony coachman, whom Helen greeted warmly. Then her cousin told her that she had better drive home at once. "I shall stay and attend to the trunks, and will see you later," he said.

So Helen, Marion, and the boys were bundled into the carriage, and drove away through the streets of Scarborough,—Helen explaining that her home was at the opposite end of the town from the station. "Indeed we are quite in the country," she said: "and I like it much better than living in town."

"Who would wish to live in a town like this!" asked Marion, eying disdainfully the rural-looking streets through which they were passing. "I like the overflowing life, the roar and fret of a great city; but places of this kind seem to me made only to put people to sleep, mentally as well as physically."

"Oh, Scarborough is a very nice place when you know it!" said Helen, in arms at once for her birth-place. "And I assure you people are not asleep in it, by any means."

"These young gentlemen certainly look wide

awake," resumed Marion, regarding the two boys, who were in turn regarding her with large and solemn eyes. "And so looked your cousin — very wide awake indeed."

"Oh, Frank is a delightful boy!" exclaimed Helen; "and I am very fond of him."

"I am glad to hear it," said Marion. "I hope you will be fond enough of him to keep him away from me; for if I abhor anything, it is a boy — I mean" (with a glance at the two young faces before her) "a boy who fancies himself a man."

"Frank is twenty years old," observed Harry, who, being himself barely ten, naturally regarded this as a venerable age.

"So I imagined," replied Marion; "and twenty is not my favorite age — for a man. Jock's age suits me better. Jock, how old are you?"

Jock replied that he was seven; but at this point an exclamation from Helen cut the conversation short; for now they were rapidly approaching a house situated in the midst of large grounds on the outskirts of the town, — a shade-embowered dwelling, on the broad veranda of which flitting forms were to be seen, as the carriage paused a moment for the gate to be opened. Helen stood up and eagerly waved her handkerchief; then they drove in, swept around a large circle and drew up before an open door, from which poured a troop of eager welcomers of all ages and colors.

It seemed to Marion a babel of sound which ensued — kisses, welcomes, hand-shakings, questions, — then she was swept along by the tide into the cool, garnished house, and thence on to a bowery

chamber, where she was left for a little while to herself: since Helen was, after all, the grand object of the ovation, and it was into Helen's room that the loyal crowd gathered, who had merely given to Marion that cordial welcome which no stranger ever failed to receive on a Southern threshold.

Only Helen's mother — who, having been twice married, was now Mrs. Dalton — lingered behind with the young stranger, and looked earnestly into the fair face, as if seeking a likeness.

"You are very little like your mother, my dear," she said at last; "though you have her eyes. Alice was beautiful, but it was a gentle beauty; while you — well, I think you must be altogether a Lynde."

"I know that I am very like the Lyndes," Marion answered. "I have a miniature of my father, which I can see myself that I resemble."

"He was a very handsome man," said Mrs. Dalton, "and daring — ah! it was no wonder that he was among the first to rush into the war, and among the first to be killed! My child, you do not know how my heart has yearned over you during all these years, how happy I was to hear of your being at the convent with Helen, and now how glad I am to see you under my own roof. I want you to feel that you are like a daughter of the house."

"You are very kind," replied Marion, touched by the evident sincerity of the words. "I am glad, too, to know at last some of my mother's kindred."

"I can't help wishing that you looked more like her," said Mrs. Dalton, returning wistfully to that point. "She was very lovely — though you — I suppose I need not tell you what *you* are. My dear" —

and suddenly the elder woman stooped to kiss the younger — “ I am sorry for you.”

“ I am sorry for you ! ” The words lingered on Marion’s ear after her aunt’s kindly presence had left the room and she stood alone, asking herself why she was so often met in this manner. Why was it that, even with her royal beauty, she had thus far encountered more of pity than of admiration? Why did all eyes that had looked on the sin and sorrow of earth regard her with compassion, and why had she heard so often in her old life that which was her first greeting in the new — “ I am sorry for you ” ?

“ Sorry ! — for what ? ” The girl asked herself this with fiery and impatient disdain. What did they all mean? Why did this keynote of unknown misfortune or suffering meet her at every turn, like a shadow flung forward by the unborn future? Why did this refrain always ring in her ears? She was tired of it — so she said to herself with sudden passion, — and she would let the future prove whether or not their pity was misplaced.

She let down her magnificent hair as she thought this, and looked at herself in the mirror out of a burnished cloud. Not, however, as most beautiful women look at the fair image that smiles from those shadowy depths — not with the gratified gaze of self-admiration or the glance of conscious power, but with a criticism severe and stern enough to have banished all loveliness from a less perfect face; with a cool reckoning and appreciation, in which the innocent vanity of girlhood bore no part. And when this scrutiny was ended, the smile that came over her face spoke more of resolution than of pleasure.

She took up a comb then, and began arranging her hair. The task did not occupy her many minutes; for her deft fingers were very quick, and no one had ever accused her of caring for the arts of the toilet. On the contrary, she had always manifested a careless disregard of them, which puzzled her associates, and was by not a few set down to affectation. Now, when she had piled her hair on top of her head like a coronal of red gold, she proceeded to make her simple toilet, with scarcely another glance toward the mirror. It was soon completed, and she had been ready some time when a knock at the door was followed by the appearance of Helen's beaming face.

"So you are dressed?" she said. "I came to show you the way down. I would have come sooner, but, you know, there was so much to say."

"And to hear," added Marion. "I can imagine, though I do not know, what such a home-coming is. And what a lovely home you have, Helen!"

"You have hardly seen it yet," answered Helen. "Come and let me show you all over it."

It was certainly a spacious and pleasant house, built with the stately, honest solidity of the work of former generations, but with many modern additions which served to enhance its picturesqueness and comfort. Marion praised it with a sincerity that delighted Helen; and, having made a thorough exploration, they passed out of the wide lower hall into a veranda, which, as in most Southern houses, was at this hour the place of general rendezvous. Here a pretty dark-eyed girl came forward to meet them.

"I was introduced to you when you arrived, Miss

Lynde," she said, "but there was such a hubbub I fancy you did not notice me, and I am glad to welcome you again. I feel as if Helen's cousin must be my cousin too."

"Helen's cousin is much obliged," said Marion. "You are Miss Morley, then?"

"I am the Netta of whom you have doubtless heard. But pray sit down. Are you not tired from your journey?"

"A little. It was so warm and dusty!" answered Marion. "But this seems a perfect place of rest," she added, as she sank on a lounge that had been placed just under the odorous shade of the vines which overran the front of the veranda. "I mean to indulge freely in the luxury of idleness here."

"I hope you will," said Helen. "But I wish that you felt sufficiently rested to come with me into the garden. I should like you to see how lovely it is."

"I wish that I did, but I don't. Pray go yourself, however. You must not let me begin my visit by being a bore to you. Miss Morley, pray take her along."

After some little demur, the two girls complied with her request, and with sincere satisfaction Marion watched them disappear down the garden paths. She was very fond of Helen, she told herself and certainly believed; but, none the less, a very moderate amount of Helen's society sufficed to content, and any more to weary her. Just now she felt particularly wearied, as if both mind and body had been on a strain; and, sinking back on the couch, with the vines breathing their rich perfume over her, she remained so still while the shades of twilight began to gather, that any one who discovered her would have had to look very closely.

This was presently proved; for the silence, which had lasted some time, was broken by a quick step — a step which passed across the veranda and entered the hall, where a ringing and hilarious voice soon made itself heard.

“Where is everybody?” it inquired. “Surely I am late enough! I thought they would all be down by this time.”

“They’ve all been down ever so long, Frank,” a child’s shrill tones replied. “They are out in the garden — Helen and Netta and Cousin Marion.”

“Oh, very good! Come along, Jock, and let us find them,” said Mr. Frank Morley. “Has your cousin Paul been here yet?”

“No — not yet.”

“Ah, better still! We are before him, then. I shall go and welcome Helen over again, and take a kiss before she can prevent it.”

“Then she’ll box your ears — I saw her do it once!” cried Jock, in glee. “Oh! yes; I’ll come along with you, Frank.”

The tall, lithe figure, followed by the smaller one, crossed the veranda again, and strode toward the garden, leaving Marion smiling to herself in her shady nook.

Ten minutes later another step — this time a more sedate one — sounded on the gravel. But keener eyes explored the veranda before their owner entered the house. Consequently they discovered the figure under the vines, and Marion was startled by a quiet voice which said: —

“What! all alone, Helen? I had not hoped for such good fortune — so soon.”

CHAPTER II.

PROBABLY the speaker had seldom been more surprised than when Marion rose quickly, and, the last glow from the west falling over her, he found himself face to face with a stranger.

Even to the most self-possessed there is something a little embarrassing when tender tones or caressing words are heard by ears for which they were not intended; and, although there was nothing specially significant in the letter of this speech, its spirit had been eloquent enough to make Mr. Paul Rathborne start with confusion when he discovered his mistake.

“I beg pardon,” he said, a little hastily — “I did not observe — that is” (with a sudden grasp of self-possession), “I thought I was addressing my cousin. I suppose I have the pleasure of seeing Miss Lynde?”

“Yes,” answered Marion. “And you, I presume, are Mr. Rathborne?”

He bowed. “I am glad to perceive that you have heard of me.”

“Oh!” said Marion, “in knowing Helen, one knows all the people that make up her home circle. I assure you I feel intimately acquainted with yourself and all the Morleys, and the children —”

“And probably the horses and the dogs,” he said

as she paused. "I am aware of the comprehensiveness of Helen's affections."

"Her heart is large enough to hold all that she gives a place in it," remarked Marion.

"Oh! no doubt," said Mr. Rathborne. "But, perhaps, if one had one's choice, one would be flattered by more exclusiveness."

Marion glanced at him and thought, "It is evidently in your nature to want to monopolize." But she only said: "I do not think you have reason to complain of your place in Helen's regard."

"I have no thought of complaining," he replied; "I am very grateful for all the regard she is good enough to give me."

The humility of the words could not conceal an arrogance of tone, which did not escape the ear of the listener. At that moment she was as thoroughly convinced as ever afterward that this man perfectly understood how paramount was the place he held in Helen's regard.

"Helen's affection is something for which one may well be grateful," she observed, sincerely enough. "But do you not wish to find her? She is in the garden."

Mr. Rathborne did not stir. "If she is in the garden," he said, "she will no doubt come in presently. And I judge from sounds which I hear in that direction that she is not alone. If you do not object, I will remain here and wait for her."

"Object! Why should I object?" asked Marion. She reseated herself, and was not displeased that Mr. Rathborne drew forward a chair and also sat down. She was aware that he was, in a manner, engaged to

Helen — in other words, that their positive engagement had only been deferred on account of Helen's youth; but the fact did not at all detract from the interest he had for her — the interest of a man with wider life and, presumably, wider thoughts than the school-girls who, up to this time, had formed her social atmosphere. It offended her, therefore, that when he spoke next it was in the tone of one addressing a school-girl.

“ I suppose, Miss Lynde, that, like Helen, you were very much attached to the convent? ”

“ It is not at all safe to suppose that I am in any respect like Helen, ” she replied. “ We are very good friends, but exceedingly different in character. ”

“ And therefore in tastes? ”

“ That follows, does it not? Different characters must have different tastes. ”

“ It certainly seems a natural inference. And so I am to presume that you were *not* attached to the convent? ”

“ That is going rather too far. I liked it better than any other school at which I ever was placed. But I am not fond of restraint and subjection; therefore I am glad that my school-days are over. ”

Mr. Rathborne smiled slightly. Even in the dusk he could see enough of the presence before him to judge that restraint and subjection would indeed be little likely to please this imperial-looking creature.

“ I am to congratulate you, then, ” he said, “ on the fact that your school-days are definitely over? ”

“ Yes, they are definitely over, and it remains now to be seen what schooling life holds for me. ”

“ Certainly a singular girl this! ” thought the man,

who was well aware that most young ladies had little thought of what schooling life might hold for them. "If I may be permitted to prophesy," he said aloud, "I think that life has in store for you only pleasant experiences."

"That is very kind of you," answered Marion, with a mocking tone in her voice, which was very familiar to her associates; "but I don't know that I have any claim to special exemption from the usual lot of mankind; and certainly pleasant experiences are not the usual lot, unless everyone is very much mistaken."

"People are too much given to sitting down and moaning over the unpleasantness of life, when they might make it otherwise by taking matters into their own hands," said Mr. Rathborne. "But that requires a strong will."

"And something beside will, does it not?"

"Oh! of course the ability to seize opportunity, and make one's self master of it."

"That is what I should like," said Marion, speaking as if to herself: "to seize opportunity. But the opportunity must come in order to be seized."

"There is little doubt but that it will come to you," remarked her companion, more and more impressed.

How far the conversation might have progressed in this personal vein, into which it had so unexpectedly fallen, it is difficult to say; for a spark of congenial sympathy had been already struck between these two people, who a few minutes before had been absolute strangers to each other. But at this point Mrs. Dalton stepped out of the hall and came toward them.

“ I thought I heard your voice, Paul,” she said, as Rathborne rose to shake hands with her; “ and I wondered to whom you were talking, since I knew the girls were in the garden. But this is Marion, is it not? ”

“ It is Marion,” replied that young lady. “ I did not go into the garden — I felt too tired, — and Mr. Rathborne found me here a few minutes ago.”

“ It is somewhat late for an introduction, then,” said Mrs. Dalton, “ since you have already made acquaintance.”

“ Not a very difficult task,” observed Rathborne. “ I have heard a good deal of Miss Lynde, and she was good enough to say that my name was not altogether unknown to her.”

“ Helen talks so much of her friends that they could hardly avoid knowing one another,” resumed Mrs. Dalton. “ But pray go and tell her, Paul, that it is time to come in to tea.”

“ With pleasure,” said Mr. Rathborne, departing with an alacrity which seemed to imply that only politeness had prevented his going before.

At least so Mrs. Dalton interpreted the quickness of his step, as she looked after him for an instant, and then turned to Marion. “ I suppose, my dear,” she said, “ that you have heard Helen speak of Paul very often? ”

“ Very often indeed,” answered Marion.

“ And you are probably aware that if I had not refused to allow her to bind herself while she was so young, they would be engaged? ”

Marion signified that she had also heard this — exhaustively.

“The responsibilities of a parent are very great,” said Mrs. Dalton, with a sigh. “I certainly have every reason to trust Paul, who has been as helpful as a son to me in all business matters since my husband’s death — he is my nephew by marriage, you know — yet I hesitate when I think of trusting Helen’s happiness to him. She is so very affectionate that I do not think she could be happy with any one who did not feel as warmly as herself. Now, Paul is very reserved in character and cold in manner. I fear that he would chill and wound her — after a while.”

“But is it not a rule that people like best those who are most opposite to them in character?” asked Marion, whose interest in Helen’s love-affair began to quicken a little since she had met its hero.

“I believe it is a general rule,” replied Mrs. Dalton, dubiously; “but I distrust its particular application in this case. And, then, they are not of the same religion.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Marion, carelessly, “that surely does not matter — with liberal people.”

“It matters with Catholics,” said Mrs. Dalton. “Although not a Catholic yourself, you ought to know that.”

“I know that people who have always been Catholics feel so. But you, who were once a Protestant — I should think that you would be more broad.”

“Converts are the last people to be broad in that respect,” said Mrs. Dalton. “They have known too much of the bitterness of differing feeling on that subject. But you do not understand, so we will not discuss it. I forgot for a moment that you are separated from us in faith.”

“ I am separated from you because I do not hold *your* faith,” said Marion, frankly; “ but I am not separated because I hold any other. All religions are alike to me, except that I respect the Catholic most. But I could never belong to it.”

“ Never is a long day,” observed Mrs. Dalton. “ You do not know what light the future may hold for you. However, we will talk of this another time; for here come the garden party.”

They came through the twilight as she spoke, the light dresses of the girls showing with pretty effect against the dark masses of shrubbery, and their gay young voices ringing out, with accompaniment of laughter, through the still air.

“ Marion! — where is Marion?” cried Helen, as she reached the veranda. “ Oh! there you are still, under the vines! Here is a greeting from the garden that you would not go to see.”

It was a cluster of odorous roses — splendid jacquemins — which fell into Marion’s lap, and which she took up and pinned against her white dress. Their glowing color lent a fresh touch of brilliancy to her appearance when Paul Rathborne found himself opposite to her at the well-lighted tea-table. The twilight had revealed to him that she was handsome, but he had not been prepared for such beauty as now met and fascinated his gaze. He regarded her with a wonder which was as evident as his admiration, and not less flattering to her vanity. For Helen’s confidences had enabled her to form a very correct idea of this cold, self-contained man; and she felt that to move him so much was no small earnest of her power to move others.

Meanwhile she glanced at him now and then with critical observation, seeing a keen face, with deep-set eyes under a brow more high than broad; a thin-lipped mouth, which did not smile readily; and a general air of reserve and power. It was a face not without attraction to the girl, whose own spirit was sufficiently ambitious and arrogant to recognize and respond to the signs of such a spirit in another. "He is a man who means to make his way in the world, and who will use poor little Helen as a stepping-stone," she thought. "A cold, supercilious, selfish man — the kind of man who despises women, I fancy. Let us see if he will despise *me*."

There was not much reason to suspect Mr. Rathborne of such presumption. Almost his first remark to Helen, when they were together after tea, was, "What a remarkable person your cousin seems to be!"

"Marion?" said Helen. "Yes, she is so remarkable that Claire and I have often said that she is made for some great destiny. She looks like an empress, does she not?"

Rathborne laughed. "She has a very imperial air, certainly," he said; "and she is strikingly beautiful. She might have the world at her feet if she had a fortune. But I suppose she has very little?"

"None at all, I think," answered Helen, simply. "And it has embittered her. She values money too highly."

"It is difficult to do that," said Rathborne, dryly; "and Miss Lynde knows what is fitted for her when she desires wealth. I never saw a woman who seemed more evidently born for it."

“ I wish I could give her my fortune,” said Helen, sincerely. “ She hates poverty so much, while I would not at all mind being poor.”

An echo of the wish shot through Rathborne’s mind, but he only said, with one of his faint, flitting smiles: “ My dear Helen, you are not exactly a judge of the poverty you have never tried. And, while it is very good of you to wish to give your cousin your fortune, there can be no doubt that with such a face she will not go through life without finding one.”

Helen looked across the room at the beautiful face of which he spoke. In her heart no pang of envy stirred, only honest admiration as she said: “ I knew you would admire her! ”

“ Admire her — yes,” Paul answered; “ one could hardly fail to do that. But I do not think I shall like her. I like amiable, gentle women, and I am very certain that not even *you* can say that Miss Lynde is amiable and gentle.”

CHAPTER III.

YOU have not told me yet, Marion, what you think of Paul," said Helen the next day.

The two girls were together in a handsome, airy parlor, through which the stream of family life had been flowing all morning, but from which it had now ebbed, leaving them alone. Helen, who had been flitting like a bird from one occupation, or attempt at occupation, to another, now threw herself into a chair by one of the low open windows, and looked at Marion, who was lying luxuriously on a couch near by, and for an hour past had not lifted her eyes from her book.

They were lifted now, however, and regarded the speaker quietly. "What do I think of Mr. Rathborne?" she asked. "My dear Helen, what can I possibly think of him on such short acquaintance, except that he is tall and good-looking, and appears to have a very good opinion of himself?"

"O Marion!"

"For all that I know, it may be an opinion based on excellent grounds, but it is undoubtedly the first thing about him that attracts one's attention."

"It is based on excellent grounds," said Helen, with some spirit. "Everyone who knows Paul admires and looks up to him."

“Not quite everyone,” observed an unexpected voice, and through the window by which she sat Mr. Frank Morley stepped into the room. “I am sorry to come upon the scene with a contradiction,” he said, as he took his cousin’s hand; “but really, you know, Helen, that is too sweeping an assertion. I don’t look up to Paul Rathborne.”

“So much the worse for you, then,” said Helen. “A boy like you could not do better.”

“I think that a boy, even though he were like me, might do much better. He might look up to some one who was not so selfish and conceited.”

A rose flame came into Helen’s cheeks. “You are very rude as well as ill-natured,” she answered in a low tone. “You have no right to say such things to *me*.”

“I have never been told that there was any reason why I should not say them to you,” replied the young man, significantly; “but I had no intention of making myself disagreeable. After all, the truth is not always to be told.”

“It is not the truth,” exclaimed Helen, with a flash of fire in her glance. “Paul is neither selfish nor conceited. But you never liked him, Frank — you know you never did.”

“I never hesitated to confess it,” said Frank; “but I regret having annoyed you, Helen. I did not think you would take my opinion of Mr. Rathborne so much to heart.”

“It is not your opinion,” responded Helen. “It is — it is the injustice!” And then, as if unwilling to trust herself further, she sprang up and left the room.

There was an awkward pause for a moment after her departure. Mr. Frank Morley began to whistle, but checked himself, with an apologetic glance at Marion, who, leaning back on the cushions of her couch, was faintly smiling.

"I have, as usual, put my foot into it," said the young man. "But I could not imagine that Helen would be so fiery. She used to laugh when I abused Paul."

"Did she?" asked Marion. "But, then, you know, there comes a time when one ceases to laugh; and if one likes a friend, one does not wish to hear him abused. That time seems to have arrived with her."

"Yes," said Morley, rather ruefully. "And the worst of it is that it looks as if she liked the fellow better than I imagined. I am awfully sorry for that."

"You evidently do not like him."

"I!—no indeed. As Helen remarked, I never liked him, but I like him less and less as time goes on."

"What is the matter with him?"

"Everything is the matter with him. He is as cold as a stone; he cares for nobody in the world but Paul Rathborne, and for nothing that does not advance that important person's interest. He is supercilious until one longs to knock him down; and so ambitious that he would walk over the body of his dearest friend—granting that he had such a thing—to advance himself in life one inch."

"Altogether a very charming character!" remarked Marion. "It is certain that you are not the dearest friend over whose body he would walk."

Young Morley laughed. "No," he said, frankly. "I would walk over *his* with a good deal of pleasure; but he will never walk over mine, if I can help it. Though he may, for all that," he added, after an instant; "for he is so sharp that one can never tell what he is up to, until it is too late to frustrate him."

"This is very interesting," said Marion. "It is like reading a novel to hear a character analyzed in so masterly a manner."

Morley colored. He was too shrewd not to know that she was laughing at him; but while the fact was sufficiently evident, it was not exactly evident how best to show his appreciation of it. After a moment he spoke in a tone which had a little offense in it:—

"I don't suppose the subject interests you, so I ought to beg pardon for dwelling on it. But I only meant to explain why Helen was vexed."

"And now *you* are vexed," observed Marion. "What have I done? I assure you I was in earnest in saying I was interested in your analysis of Mr. Rathborne's character."

"It sounded more as if you were satirical," said Morley. "And I was not trying to analyze his character: I was only answering your questions about it."

"Quite true, but those questions led to your analyzing it—and so successfully, too, that I am going to ask another. Tell me if you think he is much attached to Helen?"

A sudden cloud came over the young man's face, and his eyes seemed to darken. "I do not think he is attached to her at all," he replied, bluntly. "Or, if that is saying too much (for everyone *must* be at-

tached to Helen), I do not believe he would wish to marry her but for her fortune."

"Well," said Marion, philosophically, "I suppose it is the ordinary fate of rich women to be married for their money. And, after all, they do not seem to mind it: they appear happy enough."

"Helen would never be happy," said Frank Morley, impetuously.

"Do not be sure of that," responded the young cynic on the couch. "There is a French proverb, you know, which says: '*Il y a toujours l'un qui baisse et l'un qui tend la joue.*' Helen would play the active part in that to perfection."

The young man looked at her with something of indignation. "You may consider yourself a friend of Helen's," he remarked, "but you certainly do not understand her."

"No?" said Marion, smiling. "Then perhaps, you will enlighten me, as you have about Mr. Rathborne. I am probably deficient in penetration."

Morley made a gallant effort not to be betrayed into boyish petulance, and succeeded sufficiently to say, with a dignity which amused his tormentor:—

"I am sure that penetration is the last thing you are deficient in, Miss Lynde. But you do not credit others with enough of the quality. I, at least, know when I am laughed at. Now, if you will excuse me, I will go and make my peace with Helen."

He walked out of the room, holding his slim, young figure very erect; and Marion looked after him with a glance of mingled amusement and approval.

"Very well done, Mr. Morley!" she said to herself. "You are an uncommonly nice boy, with un-

commonly clear reasons for your opinions. Ten years hence you may be a very agreeable man. As for Mr. Rathborne, your account of him agrees entirely with my own impressions. I really do possess a little penetration, after all."

Then she took up her novel again, and settled back among the sofa-cushions with an air of comfort. At that moment her only desire was that she might not be disturbed for a reasonable length of time. The people in the book interested her much more than the people who surrounded her in life. At this period of her existence she was wrapped in a ruthless egotism, which made all human beings shadows to her, unless they touched her interest. It was not yet apparent whether any of those who were now about her would touch her interest; and until that fact was demonstrated, she troubled herself very little about them.

A quarter of an hour, perhaps, had passed without any one appearing to disturb her quiet, when, through the same window by which young Morley had entered, another presence stepped into the room. It was Rathborne, who looked around, met Marion's eyes, and came toward her with a pleased expression.

"It seems to me my good fortune to find you always alone, Miss Lynde," he observed.

"And it seems to be the custom here that visitors shall appear in the most unexpected and informal manner," said Marion. "Do they always come in unannounced, by way of the window?"

"Oh, no! Here, as elsewhere, most visitors enter decorously by way of the door. But I have long been as familiarly intimate in this house as if it were my home, and I expected to find the family assembled."

"The family has been assembled, but the different members have been called away by one thing or another, until only I remain."

"You appear to be fond of solitude."

"Is not that a wide conclusion to draw from the fact that you have found me twice alone?"

"Discerning people can draw wide conclusions from slight indications. On each occasion a person sociably inclined would not have been left alone."

"Generally speaking, I am not very sociably inclined, I suppose; but that does not mean that I object to society — when it pleases me."

"I judge that you are not very easily pleased," answered Rathborne, regarding the face which he found even more beautiful than his recollection had painted it.

She looked at him with a smile so brilliant that it almost startled him. "Are you trying to give me another proof of your discernment?" she asked. "If so, you will be gratified to hear that you are right. I am *not* easily pleased — as a rule. I suppose people are much happier who are not so 'difficult,' as my French teacher used to call me. There is Helen, for instance; she likes everything and everybody, and she is certainly happier than I am."

"But, then, unfortunately it is not very flattering to the vanity when one pleases a person who is so easily pleased."

Marion lifted her eyebrows with a mocking expression. "But why should one's vanity be flattered?" she asked. "It is not good for one that it should be."

"Not good perhaps, but very pleasant," replied

Mr. Rathborne; "and I am, like yourself, somewhat 'difficult,' and hard to please."

"Ah! then you can sympathize with me. It is not an agreeable disposition to possess."

"I can sympathize with you on a good many points — or at least so I have the presumption to fancy," he said. "There is an instinct that tells one these things. Even in our brief conversation yesterday evening I felt as if a sympathetic understanding was established between us. It seemed to me that we were likely to look at many things in the same light."

It is hardly necessary to observe that, considering what she had recently heard of the speaker's character, and hence of his probable way of looking at things, Marion should not have been very much flattered by this. But, as a matter of fact, she was flattered. She had as strong a belief in her own powers, as strong a determination to make events and people serve her ends, as Mr. Rathborne himself possessed. But her powers were untried, her ability to impress people untested; and this first proof that she *was* remarkable — that even this cold, selfish man recognized in her something altogether uncommon — something allied to his own ambitious spirit, — was like wine to her self-esteem. She thought that here was material on which she might try whatever power she had, without fear of doing mischief, — material certain to look after itself and its own interest in any event, and with which no unpleasant results could be feared.

To do her justice, Marion wanted only to make a mental impression: to extort admiration for her

unusual gifts of mind and character from this man, who, she knew instinctively, was not easily moved to admiration or interest. If she forced it from him, then she might be sure that it would be easy to win it from others. These thoughts were not absolutely formulated in her mind at this moment, but they were impressed on her consciousness sufficiently to make her reply:—

“You flatter me by saying so; for you are a man who knows the world, and I was yesterday a school-girl. It would be strange, then, if we did see things in the same light.”

“It is difficult to realize that you were yesterday—or ever—a school-girl,” said Rathborne, leaning back and looking at her intently from under his dark brows.

“That does not sound very flattering,” she replied, with a laugh; and yet in her heart she knew that it was just the kind of flattery she desired.

“I am not trying to flatter you,” he replied. “I am telling you exactly how you impress me. And I do not see how, in the name of all that is wonderful, you ever became what you are in that convent from which you come.”

A swift shade passed over Marion’s face. “You must not blame or credit the convent with what I am,” she said. “If I had gone there earlier, I might be a very different person. But my character and disposition were formed when I went there, two years ago; and the influences of the place could not change me, though they often made me feel as if change would be desirable.”

“They made you feel a mistake, then,” remarked

her companion, with emphasis. "Change in you would not be desirable. You are —"

But Marion was not destined to hear just then what she was. Steps and voices came across the hall; Helen's laugh sounded, and the next moment Helen herself appeared in the doorway, followed by Frank Morley, who had apparently succeeded in making his peace.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Sunday came, Helen said to her cousin, rather wistfully: "Will you go to church with us to-day, Marion?"

"Not to-day, I believe, if you will excuse me," answered Marion. "If I go anywhere — which is doubtful — I suppose it ought to be to the church I was brought up in."

"I thought you always said at the convent how much you preferred Catholic services," said Helen, in a disappointed tone.

"Well, at the convent, you see, one had not much choice," replied the other, laughing; "and, then, the services were charming there — so poetical and beautiful. That chapel was a picture in itself. But, from the outward appearance of your church here. I should not judge that it possessed much inward beauty."

"No," said Helen, reluctantly, "it has not much beauty; but, then, the Mass is everywhere the same, you know."

"For those who believe in it, very likely," was the careless rejoinder. "But I am an outsider. I believe only in what I see; and when I see beautiful ceremonies, I enjoy them for their beauty."

"It is just as well, in that case, that you should not go with us, my dear," said Mrs. Dalton, from the head of the table—for this conversation took place at breakfast. "Ours is a very plain little chapel, the congregation being small and poor. If you are in search of beautiful ceremonies, the Episcopal church will be more likely to gratify you. They have a new Ritualistic clergyman there, who has introduced many new customs, I hear."

"I see no particular reason why I should go anywhere," observed Marion, truthfully. "It is a very pleasant day for staying at home."

But she was not destined to stay at home on this particular Sunday, which was the beginning of a change in her life. After breakfast, while they were enjoying the freshness of the summer morning on the veranda, and before any chime of bells yet filled the air, Miss Morley made her appearance, fully dressed for church parade; and, after a general greeting, said to Marion:—

"I have come to inquire if you would like to go to church with me this morning, Miss Lynde. I have heard Helen say that you are not a Roman Catholic."

"I am not anything at all," answered Marion; "and I confess that I do not, as a rule, see the need of church-going; but, since it is such a pleasant day, and you are so kind as to come, Miss Morley, — may I ask what church you attend?"

"Oh, Netta is an Episcopalian!" interposed Helen. "She will take you to a handsome church, filled with well-dressed people, where you will have pretty ceremonies and nice music to amuse you."

"Satire is not in your style, Helen," said Marion,

putting out her hand to give a soft pinch to the round arm near her. "But, since you give such an attractive description, I believe I will go with Miss Morley."

"Then we have not much time to spare," said that young lady, with a glance at her dress, as a concert of bells suddenly burst out.

"Oh, I will be ready in a few minutes!" exclaimed Marion, smiling.

Her simple toilet was soon made, yet its very simplicity enhanced the striking character of her beauty; and when she followed Miss Morley up the softly-carpeted aisle of the Episcopal church, every eye turned on her, and everyone wondered who she could be. To herself, the atmosphere which surrounded her was very agreeable, speaking as it did of wealth and refined tastes. Beautiful architectural forms, polished woods, stained glass, a pretty procession; sweet, clear voices singing to the rich roll of a fine organ; and a congregation which gave the impression of belonging altogether to the favored classes of society,—these things she liked, independently of any religious association or meaning.

Indeed, as a religious ceremony, the service seemed to Marion very much of a failure, so recently had she witnessed the divine Reality of worship. She missed the thrill of awe which had come even to her when the Sacred Host was lifted up to heaven in the Mass; and her keen, unprejudiced mind realized how entirely what she now saw was only the mutilated remnant of an older and grander ritual. "It is a pity that the Catholic religion is so exacting, and that so many common people belong to it," she thought; "for it is

the only one with any reality about it, or any claim to one's respect."

Nobody would have suspected these reflections, however, from her outward deportment. She went through the service decorously, and listened with exemplary attention to the sermon, which was by no means contemptible as a literary effort. Her beautiful face — conspicuously placed in one of the front pews — somewhat distracted the attention of the young clergyman, and he found himself now and again looking from his MS. to meet the large, dark eyes fixed so steadily on him. But Marion herself was distracted by no one, although she was aware of the appearance and manner of everybody in her immediate neighborhood.

Among the rest, she observed a lady who sat near, and more than once glanced inquiringly toward her; a lady of specially distinguished and fashionable appearance. "She does not belong to Scarborough," thought Marion, noticing (without appearing to do so) some of the details of her costume. And her conclusion she soon found was correct. When the services were over, and the congregation, passing out of church, interchanged salutations as they went, Miss Morley acknowledged a greeting from this lady; and Marion, as they walked on, said: "Who is that handsome and elegant woman?"

"Mrs. Singleton," was the reply. "She *is* very handsome and very elegant, is she not? But she does not live in Scarborough; she is here only for the summer."

"I felt sure of that," thought Marion — though she had too much tact to say so. "Who is she? — where does she come from?" she asked.

“She is one of *the* Singletons,” answered Netta — “at least her husband is,—and you know who they are. They appear to have ample means, and live in a great many places. She has just returned from Europe.”

“And why has she come to Scarborough?” inquired Marion, in a tone not altogether flattering to that place.

“Well, chiefly, I believe, because the climate here agrees wonderfully with an old gentleman who is her husband’s uncle, to whom they seem to devote themselves.”

“Is he wealthy?” asked Marion, with unconscious cynicism.

“Oh, very!” replied Netta, with simplicity; “immensely rich, I believe, and has no children; so he lives with the Singletons, or *they* live with him.”

“The last most likely,” said Marion, whose knowledge of life was largely drawn from its seamy side.

The conversation ended here, and she thought no more of it. But on the evening of the next day Miss Morley came into the drawing room where the family group were assembled after tea, and, turning to Marion, said:—

“Do you remember our speaking of Mrs. Singleton as we came from church yesterday, Miss Lynde? She seems to have been as much impressed by you as you were by her. I met her on the street this morning, and she stopped me to ask who you were. I suppose I must not venture to repeat all that she said of your appearance, but I may tell you that she has some connections named Lynde, and that she is very curious to know if you belong to them.”

"I am sorry that I can not satisfy her," said Marion, who showed no signs of being as flattered as she really was. "Family genealogies have never interested me. If my uncle were here now, he could tell her all that she wished to know."

"So that elegant Mrs. Singleton is in Scarborough again this summer!" cried Helen, with interest. "Is the same old gentleman with her, and do they still keep up an establishment with so much style?"

"Oh, yes!" her cousin answered. "They have taken the Norton House for the summer, and have brought a beautiful carriage and horses, and servants, with them. Not many people have seen the old gentleman yet. I hear that he is feebler than he was last year.

"Then no doubt Mrs. Singleton still laments touchingly how sad it is for old people—for their own sakes entirely!—when they live too long," said Paul Rathborne, who was present as usual.

"At least she does not devote much of her time and attention to him," responded Mrs. Dalton, "unless report greatly belies her."

"Why should she?" said Rathborne. "He has an expensive, highly-trained nurse for his special service, besides a staff of servants. What could she do for him, except worry him? Oh, no: it is not on account of any demand upon her time or attention that she thinks he lives too long, but because he keeps his fortune in his own hands, and will until death relaxes his hold of it."

"How awful," exclaimed Helen, with a shudder, "to want anybody to die! I cannot believe that Mrs. Singleton does. She seems so kind and pleasant."

“And you think everyone must be kind and pleasant who seems so?” said Rathborne, with a covert sneer. “My dear Helen, it will not do to judge the world by yourself.”

“Why not?” asked Helen, innocently. “Why should I not believe that others are honest and sincere as well as myself?”

“Well, really there does not seem any reason on the surface, except that experience proves it otherwise,” he answered, with a laugh.

“I hope it may be long before experience proves it to me,” said Helen. “I can not bear to think badly of people. It seems to me that it would break my heart to be forced to think badly of any one for whom I cared.”

If one heart present felt a twinge of compunction at those words, there was no sign of it; but Mrs. Dalton looked at her daughter with a sudden glance of something like apprehension.

“You should not talk in such a way, Helen,” she said. “A broken heart is not a thing of which to speak lightly.”

“I did not intend to speak lightly,” answered Helen. “I meant what I said very seriously. I do not think I could bear it.”

“That is foolish,” continued her mother. “We must bear whatever God sends.”

“I do not think Helen will ever have to bear a broken heart, or anything like it,” observed Marion. “I am very certain that she is made for happy fortune.”

“No one in the world, who lives for any length of time, can know unbrokenly happy fortune,” said Mrs. .

Dalton, gravely. "But I do not think it well to discuss such personal subjects."

"Then we will discuss the rich old man who has a highly-trained nurse and a staff of servants," said Marion, laughingly. "Tell me" — turning to Rathborne — "what is his name?"

"Singleton," replied that gentleman. "Have you never heard of him? He is a very rich man; and Tom Singleton — the husband of the lady you have seen — hopes to inherit his wealth."

"He is his nearest relative?"

"Oh, I presume there are other nieces and nephews, but he is a favorite of the old man."

"Have I not heard something of a disowned son?" asked Mrs. Dalton.

"A disowned son!" repeated Marion. "I did not know that people out of novels — and even in novels it has gone out of fashion — ever disowned their sons now."

"As I have heard the story," said Rathborne, "it is more a case of the son disowning the father. He refused to comply with his father's wishes in any respect, and finally broke away and left home, going off to South America, I believe. He has not been heard of for a considerable number of years, and Tom Singleton says there is every reason to believe him dead. Of course the wish is father to the thought with *him*, but others have told me the same thing."

"Perhaps his father drove him away by harshness, and remorse is what is the matter with him," said Netta Morley, solemnly.

Rathborne laughed. "From my knowledge of old Mr. Singleton," he replied, "I should not judge that

remorse preyed upon him to any great extent. The son, I have been told, was a wild, rebellious youth, whom it was impossible to control—one of those unfortunate human beings who seem born to go wrong, and whom no influence can restrain.”

“Where was the poor boy’s mother?” asked Mrs. Dalton.

“She died when he was very young. But, with all due deference to the popular idea of a mother’s influence, I think we see many cases in which it fails altogether.”

“Yes.” said Mrs. Dalton. “But even if her influence fails, her patience is more long-suffering than that of any one else, and her love is more enduring. Perhaps this boy might not have been lost if his mother had lived.”

“If we begin with ‘perhaps’ we may imagine anything we please,” remarked Rathborne, in a tone which Marion had learned to understand as expressing contempt for the opinion advanced.

“Without indulging in any imagination at all, so much as is known of the Singletons is very interesting indeed,” she said, in her clear, fluent voice. “If I see any of them, I shall look at them with much more attention from having heard this romantic story of a lost son and a great fortune.”

“I think you are very likely to see Mrs. Singleton,” observed Netta. “She spoke as if she desired to make your acquaintance.”

“That is a great compliment—from her,” said Helen. “What an impression you must have made, Marion!”

CHAPTER V.

EVENTS soon proved that Helen was right in saying that Marion must have made an impression upon Mrs. Singleton. A few days later that lady's card was brought to Mrs. Dalton, who regarded it with mild surprise, saying, "Why, I have not called on her since her arrival this summer!"

"But you called on her last summer," said Helen; "and I suppose she has some reason for coming without waiting for you to make another formal visit. Pray find out what it is."

It was not at all difficult to discover Mrs. Singleton's reason for the visit. She declared it frankly and at once. "I hear that you have your charming daughter at home, Mrs. Dalton," she said; "and, knowing her accomplishments, I want to secure her aid for some musical evenings I am anxious to inaugurate. Mr. Singleton — my husband's uncle — finds almost his only pleasure in music; so I desire very much that these evenings shall be a success. Do you think Miss Morley will assist me?"

"I have no doubt she will be very glad to do so," answered Mrs. Dalton.

"I am delighted to hear it. And I am told that a very striking-looking young lady, whom I saw in

church with Miss Netta Morley last Sunday, is your niece. Has she, also, taste and talent for music?"

"Oh! yes; she has a finer voice than Helen," said Mrs. Dalton, "and sings much better."

"How very charming for me!" cried Mrs. Singleton. "May I have the pleasure of seeing the young ladies? I should like to have their definite promise to help me."

The young ladies were summoned, and very readily gave the promise asked of them. They would be delighted, they said, to assist to the full extent of their musical abilities. "And when," Helen asked, "will the evenings begin?"

"Oh! at once," Mrs. Singleton replied. "On every Wednesday I hope to gather all the musical talent of Scarborough into my drawing-room. I shall send out my cards immediately to that effect. You don't know, Miss Lynde," — turning to Marion — "how pleased I am to find unexpectedly such an addition as I am sure you will prove."

Marion smiled. "You are very kind," she said; "but I fear you are taking too much for granted. I am not a good musician. I have never had industry enough. Helen plays much better than I do."

"Oh, but, Marion, your voice is so fine!" cried Helen. "And everyone likes singing best."

"I do, I confess," said Mrs. Singleton. "And so, I think, does my uncle. I have no doubt that you sing well, Miss Lynde."

"That is kind of you again," responded Marion; "but I must warn you that Helen is not altogether a trustworthy witness. She always thinks well of what her friends do, and poorly of what she does herself."

“ I am willing to wait and let Mrs. Singleton decide whether or not I think too well of what you do,” observed Helen, with a gay little nod.

“ Mrs. Singleton has no doubt what her decision will be,” said that lady. “ Meanwhile, Miss Lynde, I wonder if we are not related in some way? I am very certain that the Singletons have connections of your name, and I fancy it must be your family.”

“ It is likely,” answered Marion; “ but matters of pedigree and relationship have never interested me sufficiently for me to know much about them. I regret that fact now,” she continued, with unusual graciousness; for she felt that she would not be sorry to be able to claim relationship with people of such social position as these were.

“ Oh! ” said Mrs. Singleton, “ my uncle will know all about it, I am sure. Like most people of the old school, he thinks a great deal of such things. And I hope I may prove right in my conjecture,” she added, as she rose to take leave.

“ *What* an impression you must have made upon her, Marion!” cried Helen, as soon as they were alone. “ Do you know that she is usually the most supercilious woman, and so haughty that the idea of her claiming relationship with any ordinary person seems incredible! ”

“ Do you consider me an ordinary person? ” asked Marion, laughing, as she walked toward a mirror. “ I am exceedingly obliged to you.”

“ You know that I consider you a most extraordinary person,” answered Helen, with emphasis; “ but Mrs. Singleton does not know yet what you are in yourself, and — and you are not rich or — ”

“Distinguished in any way,” said Marion, as she paused. “There is no doubt of that. As far as the outward accidents of life go, I am a very insignificant person. But I shall not be so always, Helen. I am sure of that; and people who know the world seem to have an instinct of it also.”

Helen looked at the fair face which, with such an air of conscious power, regarded itself in the mirror. To her this ambition belonged to the order of inexplicable things; yet she had a belief that it was natural enough in Marion, and that it was fully justified by gifts which she acknowledged without defining.

“No one could know you and not be sure of it,” she said, in answer to the last speech. “Of course you will fill some great place in the world — we settled *that* long ago. But I do think it strange that Mrs. Singleton should recognize how remarkable you are — so soon.”

“Perhaps it is an indication that other people will recognize it too,” replied Marion, with a smile; while she said to herself that one other person had recognized it already.

And, indeed, the recognition of that person had by this time become sufficiently evident to everyone. In the innocence of her heart, Helen rejoiced that her hero and oracle agreed with her in admiring the cousin whom she admired so much. “I knew how it would be!” she said to him, triumphantly. “You might be critical about other people, but I knew you *must* acknowledge that Marion is beyond criticism.”

“That, however, is just what I don’t acknowledge,” Rathborne answered, laughingly. “Miss Lynde is by no means beyond criticism; she is only a beautiful

and clever young lady, who has clearly determined to do the best for herself without much regard for others."

"Marion has never been taught or accustomed to think of others," said gentle Helen. "But I do not think she would harm any one for her own advantage."

"Oh! no; she would only quietly walk over the person who was unlucky enough to get in her way," remarked Rathborne. "And it is not I who would blame her for that."

Helen looked at him reproachfully. "Now you are doing yourself injustice," she said. "I understand that you do not mean anything of the kind, but such remarks make others think badly of you."

"No doubt," he replied, carelessly; "but, my dear Helen, there is nothing in the world of less importance to me than what others — the class of others you mean — think of me."

"But it is of great importance to *me*," said Helen. "I cannot bear that you should be misjudged by any one."

He laughed — people were right who said of Rathborne that he had not a pleasant laugh — as he replied, "Who can say when one is misjudged? Don't trouble yourself about that. As long as you are satisfied with me, I can snap my fingers at the rest of the world."

"You know how well I am satisfied," said Helen.

"Yes, I know," he answered, with a short thrill of compunction. "I am not all you think me, Helen. The 'others,' whose opinion makes you indignant, are nearer right than you are, if the truth were known, I suspect."

“You shall not say such things!” cried Helen. “There is nothing I could want changed in you, except”—her face fell a little—“except your religion. If you were only a Catholic I should be perfectly happy.”

Rathborne smiled a little, as one would at the folly of a child. “I a Catholic!” he said. “My imagination is not strong enough to fancy that. No, my dear little Helen; you must be content with me as I am.”

“Have you read the book I gave you — which you promised to read?” asked Helen, wistfully.

“I glanced into it — because I promised you,” he answered; “but I found little of interest, and nothing to change my convictions. Do not indulge the hope that they ever will be changed. Let us understand each other on that point from the first. You are at liberty to believe and practice what you like, and I claim the same liberty for myself. Is not that just?”

“I — suppose so,” answered Helen, whose forte was not controversy, and whose eyes were full of tears. “But surely you wish to believe and practice the truth?”

Rathborne shrugged his shoulders. “What is truth?” he said. “There is ancient and high authority for that question, and I don’t know that it has ever been answered satisfactorily. I shall not endeavor to begin to answer it. And I shall not take an answer from the lips of a priest. Now let us change the subject.”

The subject was changed, but poor Helen’s heart was heavier than before it was begun. Whenever she

did not talk to Rathborne on the subject of religion, she indulged a hope of his conversion, founded on her own ardent desire; but whenever she timidly opened the subject, she felt the hopelessness of moving this nature so deeply rooted in self-opinion, spiritual indifference, and worldly interests. At such times her poor little heart had its first taste of bitterness of life,—that bitterness which is so largely made up of the jarring of different natures and of irreconcilable desires.

Meanwhile some irreconcilable desires had begun to disturb the even current of Rathborne's carefully-planned life. For years he had seen very clearly what he meant to do — first to marry Helen, in order to secure the financial independence which her fortune would give; and then to climb, by certain well-marked steps, the ladder of professional and political eminence. He had never hesitated or wavered for an instant in this plan, neither had any obstacle arisen in his way. Helen had yielded to his influence, her mother's opposition was easily overcome, his professional success was all that he could desire, and already he was known as a man certain to gain the coveted prizes of public life.

But now into this well-ordered and orderly existence a distraction came. A beautiful, imperious, ambitious woman suddenly appeared in his path, and the strongest temptation of his life assailed him — the temptation to give up Helen and her fortune for Marion and Marion's striking gifts. "What might not a man accomplish with such a brilliant and ambitious spirit to aid his own ambition!" he said to himself, and so felt the temptation grow daily stronger. Yet he was

well aware that in giving up Helen, he would give up more than her affection (which he did not count at all), and her fortune (which he counted very heavily): he would give up also a large and influential family connection, and the respect of every person of his acquaintance whose respect was worth most to him. He felt, however, that he might make up his mind to the last, if it were all; for he was too cynical and had too thorough a knowledge of the world not to know that people do not long remember anything to the disadvantage of a successful man. But to resign Helen's fortune, after the careful work of years to secure it, was something more difficult to him; and he had by no means made up his mind to do so when the above conversation took place.

It was the day of Mrs. Singleton's *musicale*; and presently Rathborne, who found conversation tiresome to maintain, said as he rose to go: "Shall I accompany you this evening? Of course I have had a card like everyone else."

"Oh! yes; come by all means," replied Helen. "Mamma is going with us, and Netta and Frank are to call by; but it is always pleasant to have *you*."

"It is not pleasant to me, however, to form one of a caravan," he said, with some impatience. "If I am to accompany you, can you not dispense with Miss Morley and her brother?"

"I hardly like to tell them not to come; and why should you object to them? It is pleasant for us all to go together."

"Do you think so?" said Rathborne, with the sneer which came so readily to his lip. Some words of Marion's recurred to his mind. "Helen is so gre-

gacious and so easily pleased," that young lady had said, "that I think she would like to live always with a mob of people." But for the memory of this speech he might not have felt so irritated with a harmless and amiable love of companionship; but the contempt which dictated the words found a ready echo in his own mind.

"If your cousins are going to accompany you, there is no need for me," he observed; "so I will content myself with meeting you at Mrs. Singleton's. Good-morning!"

"Oh, I am sorry!" said Helen, with quick regret. "Netta and Frank would think it very strange, else I would send and ask them not to come —"

"Not on my account, I beg," responded Rathborne. "I am very well satisfied with matters as they are. It gives me the opportunity of choosing my own time to appear."

"Don't be too late," said Helen. "You know that Marion and I are both going to sing; and Marion, I am sure, will do her best."

"And you also, I hope."

She shook her head. "I am not like Marion. A public performance unnerves me, but it always puts her at her best. You will hear to-night how much better she will sing for a number of people than she has ever sung for a small circle."

"I shall certainly hear," said Rathborne. "Tell Miss Lynde that I am preparing myself to be electrified."

Perhaps he was aware in uttering these words that Miss Lynde had appeared in the open door behind him. At least there was no surprise on his face, but

a great deal of satisfaction, when she came forward, saying:—

“And why, pray, Mr. Rathborne, should you be preparing yourself to be electrified?”

“Because Helen has just been telling me how much you are inspired by an audience,” he answered; “and you are to have all Scarborough for your audience.”

She made a gesture of indifference. “Give me credit,” she said, “for caring a little more for the quality than the mere quantity of appreciation. ‘All Scarborough’ does not mean a great deal to me, I assure you.”

“Such as it is, though, it will be at your feet,” he said. “Do not scorn it.”

“I shall certainly wait until it is at my feet to begin to do so,” she answered, with a laugh.

“It is not good policy to scorn even that which is at your feet,” he said. “You may need it some day.”

“Be sure that I have no inclination to scorn any kindness that comes in my way,” she observed, quickly. “You do me injustice if you believe me capable of that.”

“Then you will not scorn your audience to-night,” he answered; “for I am sure you will meet nothing but kindness from it.”

CHAPTER VI.

NEVER was a prophecy better fulfilled than that of Rathborne; for no one of the large company assembled in Mrs. Singleton's spacious drawing-room but felt prepared to admire and approve the beautiful young stranger, who was led to the piano by her host when the musical programme was about half over. Everybody had an instinct that the star of the evening had now appeared — that one who looked so proud and confident was not likely to entertain them with a mediocre performance. And, indeed, Marion, who had professed to scorn "all Scarborough," was sufficiently inspired by her audience to feel capable of doing her best. As the first notes of the accompaniment were struck, she threw back her head like one who answers to a challenge; and when she opened her lips such a tide of melody rose, such crystal-clear notes, such a flood of pure, sweet sound, that even the lowest undertone of conversation stopped, and people held their breath to listen.

Rathborne, who had been late in arriving, and who stood just outside one of the open windows, conveniently sheltered from observation, smiled to himself as he watched the scene within. It was one which gave him as much pleasure as his nature was capable of

feeling. That beautiful, stately figure beside the piano, with its regal bearing and crown of red-gold hair, deserved to be the center of all attention; and suited his own taste so exactly that he did not even perceive Helen's sweet, smiling face near by. It did not surprise him that Marion sang as he had never heard her sing before. He had read her character accurately enough, by the light of his own, to feel sure that she would never fail when occasion called for display.

His glance swept around the apartment, taking in the expressions of the various faces, and finally fastening on one that was partly sheltered behind a curtain at the end of the room. This curtain fell between the drawing-room and a smaller apartment opening from it. Now and then during the course of the evening a few of the oldest and most distinguished of Mrs. Singleton's guests were admitted to the smaller apartment, where it was understood that "old Mr. Singleton" was established to listen to the music at his ease. It must have been very much at his ease that he listened; for he had given no sign of his presence or appreciation until now, when — as if Marion's clear, ringing notes had been a spell — Rathborne observed at the opening of the curtain a thin face, with a high, aquiline nose and white moustache.

Mrs. Singleton also observed it; and as soon as the song was ended, leaving others to crowd around the singer and express their admiration, she walked to the curtained arch and exchanged a few words with the person sheltered behind it. Then, turning, she crossed the room and deftly made her way to Marion's side.

“My dear Miss Lynde,” she exclaimed, “what a pleasure you have given us! What a delight to hear such a voice as yours! My uncle is charmed, and he begs that you will sing again. Of course we all beg that you will, but I give *his* request first, because it is a very great compliment — from him.”

It was certainly a compliment which he had paid no one else; and Marion smiled with a sense of triumph. She preserved due modesty of manner and appearance, however, as she said: “I am exceedingly glad that I have been able to give pleasure to Mr. Singleton; perhaps there is some special song that he would like to hear?”

“Oh! I am sure he will like to hear anything that you sing,” replied Mrs. Singleton, who did not wish to delay the amusement of the evening long enough to make inquiry.

So Marion sang again, with increased self-confidence and success; and the thin, keen face appeared again at the opening of the curtains, as if looking were no less a pleasure than listening.

But, this song over, Mrs. Singleton was too wise a hostess to encourage any request for a third. “We must not ask too much of Miss Lynde’s kindness,” she said. “Later in the evening, perhaps she will sing for us again; and we must be reasonable. Miss Royston is going to play for us now.”

Miss Royston, a tall, angular young lady, whose elbows seemed unduly developed, took her seat on the piano-stool, struck a few crashing chords, and began a sonata. Being fresh from a conservatory of music, and having a severely classical taste, she was understood to be a very fine musician — a fact taken on

trust by most of those who composed her present audience; but very soon a conversational murmur began to be heard; those who were near windows slipped out on the veranda "to enjoy the cool air while they listened," and there was no longer any glimpse of the aquiline nose and white moustache at the opening of the *portières*.

Marion, who had not been conscious of this brief, partial appearance of the invalid recluse, for whose amusement the entertainment had been arranged, whispered to Helen, by whom she sat down: "I wonder how Mr. Singleton likes this?"

"Not as well as your singing, I am sure," answered Helen, in the same tone; "for all the time you were singing he was looking at you from behind those curtains yonder."

"Was he indeed?" said Marion. She looked at the now closed, unresponsive curtains with a quick glance of interest. "What does he look like? I wish I had seen him."

"When you sing again, glance over there and you will certainly be gratified," said Helen. "But here comes Paul at last. He has missed your singing; is not that too bad?"

"I doubt very much if he considers it so," replied Marion. "He has heard me several times and never expressed any particular pleasure, that I remember."

"That is Paul's way," said Helen, eagerly. "It is hard to tell what he feels by what he expresses. He admires your voice very much. I am sure of that."

"What is it you are so sure of, Helen?" asked Rathborne, who had drawn near enough to hear the last words through the crash of the piano.

“That you are very sorry not to have heard Marion’s singing,” answered Helen, looking up into his face with a smile.

“I should certainly have been very sorry if I had not heard it,” he said; “but, as it happens, I had that pleasure. And it was just as I expected,” he added, turning to Marion. “You sang as I never heard you sing before. An audience inspires you — an occasion calls forth all your power.”

She laughed softly. “Perhaps it was not the audience or the occasion so much as the consciousness of Mr. Singleton’s presence, and a desire to evoke some sign of interest from a critic who buries himself in silence behind drawn curtains.”

“Well, if so, you evoked it. I congratulate you upon that.”

“Helen was just telling me that he vouchsafed a glimpse of himself during my song. I wish I had seen him. I have a curiosity to know what he is like.”

“Like a very ordinary old man,” observed Rathborne, carelessly. “But here comes Mrs. Singleton — to tell us, perhaps, that we should not be talking while the music is going on.”

So far from that, Mrs. Singleton began at once to talk herself, in a discreetly lowered tone. “Miss Lynde,” she said, “I hope you have no objection to making the acquaintance of my uncle? He has asked me to bring you in to see him. He is an old man, you know, and an invalid, so you will excuse his not coming to see *you*.”

“I shall be delighted to go to him,” answered Marion, with ready courtesy and grace.

So the entire company were surprised and interested

to see their hostess leading the young stranger across the room to the jealously-guarded inner apartment where Mr. Singleton was secluded. All eyes followed them curiously, and lingered on the curtains, which Mrs. Singleton held back for a moment while Marion passed within, and then let fall.

Marion's own curiosity and gratification were equally balanced. It was like a public triumph to be led in this manner behind these curtains, which had opened for no other of the performers of the evening. Evidently this rich and presumably fastidious old man was to be included in the number of those who recognized her to be something more than ordinary. The instant that the *portières* were drawn back, she looked eagerly into the apartment thus revealed.

It was smaller than the drawing-room behind her, and was luxuriously furnished. The light which filled it was softly toned and shaded, but quite brilliant enough to show all the variety of silken-covered chairs and couches, the richly-blended tints of Eastern rugs, the carved tables and stands covered with books and papers. Sunk in the depths of one of the easiest of these easy-chairs was a small, slight man; his wasted face, with its high, distinct features, snowy hair, and moustache, thrown into relief against the back of the chair on which he leaned. His hands, which rested on its arms, were like pieces of delicate ivory carving, and his whole appearance spoke as distinctly of refinement as of ill health. Seated opposite him was an old gentleman, whose robust aspect was in strong contrast with his own, and who was talking in a tone which showed that he took no heed of the music in the next room.

He paused and rose at sight of the two ladies; but Mr. Singleton did not stir, though Marion felt his bright, keen eyes fastened on her at once. She followed her hostess, who went forward to his chair.

“Here is Miss Lynde, who has come to see you, uncle,” said that lady.

“It is very kind of Miss Lynde,” replied Mr. Singleton, with the air of the old school — that air which a younger generation has lost and forgotten. He held out his hand, and, when Marion laid her own in it, looked at her with an admiration to which she had always been accustomed, and an evident pleasure in the contemplation of so much beauty. “Will you sit down?” he said, after a moment, indicating a low chair by his side. “I want you to tell me where you learned to sing so well.”

“Where do the birds learn?” asked Marion, smiling. “I have sung like the birds as long as I can remember; although, of course, I have had some teaching. Not a great deal, however.”

“It is a pity that you should not have more,” he said. “Your voice, if fully trained, would be magnificent. But, as it is, you sing remarkably well; you have no vices of style, and you have given me a great deal of pleasure.”

“I am very glad to have given you pleasure,” answered Marion, with an air of gracious sincerity. “Mrs. Singleton has told me that you are very fond of music.”

He made a slight grimace. “I am very fond of good music,” he said; “but I do not hear a great deal of it from amateurs. When Anna told me of the

entertainment she had arranged, I had little idea of hearing such a voice as yours."

Marion laughed. "While I was singing," she said, "I had something of the feeling which I imagine the singers must have who are obliged now and then to go through an opera in an empty theater, for the sole benefit of the King of Bavaria, who is invisible in his box."

"But you had plenty of visible listeners besides the invisible one," said Mr. Singleton.

"I thought nothing of them," she answered. "I was singing to *you* altogether, and now I feel as if I had been summoned to the royal box to be complimented."

There was a playfulness in the words which deprived them of any appearance of flattery, yet it was evident that Mr. Singleton was not ill-pleased at being compared to royalty — even such eccentric royalty as that of the then living King of Bavaria.

"To carry out the comparison," he said, smiling, "I ought to have a diamond bracelet to clasp on your arm. Such are the substantial compliments of royalty. But, instead, I am going to ask a favor of you — a very great favor. Will you come some time and sing to me alone? I promise you that I will not be invisible on that occasion."

"I shall be very happy to do so," she answered, promptly. "It will be a real pleasure to myself. Tell me when I shall come."

"That must be settled hereafter. My health, and consequently my state of feeling, is very uncertain. Sometimes even music jars on me. Anna shall see you and arrange it."

Mrs. Singleton, hearing her name, turned from a conversation which she had been maintaining with the gentleman who was the other occupant of the room.

"What is it that I am to arrange?" she asked. "That Miss Lynde will come sometime and sing to us alone? Oh, that will be charming! But now I must go back to my duties, for I think I hear the sonata ending. Will you come with me?" she said to Marion.

"If my audience is ended," replied Marion, with a pretty smile, to Mr. Singleton.

"Your audience is not ended, if you do not mind remaining with an old man for a little while," he answered. "Anna can return or send for you when she wants you to entertain her guests again. Meanwhile I want you to entertain *me*."

"Before I go, then, I will introduce General Butler, and charge him to bring you back presently," said Mrs. Singleton, after which she disappeared.

General Butler, no less pleased than his friend with the charm of a beautiful face, sat down again, and said to Marion: "Your name is very familiar to me, Miss Lynde. I wonder if you are not a daughter of Herbert Lynde, who was killed at Seven Pines?"

"Yes," answered Marion, "I am his daughter, and always glad to meet his old friends. You knew him, then?"

"Oh! very well. He was in my brigade, and one of the bravest men I ever saw. I thought there was something familiar to me in your face as well as in your name. You are very like him."

"Herbert Lynde!" repeated Mr. Singleton. "If that was your father's name, my niece was right in thinking that there might be some relationship between

us. The Singletons and those Lyndes have intermarried more than once. I hope that you do not object to acknowledging a distant link of cousinship with us?"

"So far from objecting, I am delighted to hear of it," answered Marion. "Who would not be delighted to find such cousins?"

There was something a little sad as well as ironic in the smile with which Mr. Singleton heard these words, as he extended his hand and laid it on hers.

"That sounds very cordial and sincere," he said. "I hope you may never find reason to qualify your delight. I confess I am glad to find that we are not altogether strangers. It gives me a faint, shadowy claim on your kind offices. I am not a man whom many things please. But you have pleased me, and I shall like to see you again."

"I shall like to come," answered Marion, "for my own pleasure as well as for yours. I am not easily pleased either," she added, with a smile; "so you must draw the inference."

"It is one I should like to be able to draw also," observed General Butler. "This is really too narrow. I cannot claim relationship, Miss Lynde; but remember I am an old friend of your family."

"Of mine, too, then," said Marion, holding out her hand to him. As he bent over it with a flattered air, she had a triumphant sense that it was a conclusive test of her power to be able to charm and influence men of the world and of mature experience like these.

CHAPTER VII.

WELL, Marion," said Helen, "now that you have seen Mr. Singleton, what do you think of him?"

They were walking home through the soft, moonlit summer night when this question was asked; and Marion answered, lightly: "I find him charming. He is refined, fastidious, has seen a great deal of the world, and is altogether a man after my own taste."

"Then," said Frank Morley, who was walking by her side, "a man after your own taste must be a heartless valetudinarian; for that is what Mr. Singleton has the credit of being."

"As it chances," said Marion, "neither his heartlessness nor his valetudinarianism concerns me in the least — granting that they exist. But I confess to a doubt on that point. Are you very intimately acquainted with him, Mr. Morley?"

Had the moonlight been brighter, it might have been perceived that young Morley flushed at the tone of the question. "No," he answered; "I have no acquaintance with him at all. But that is the opinion of every one."

"The opinion of 'everyone' has very little weight with me," said Marion. "I prefer my own."

“You are quite right to distrust an uncharitable opinion, my dear Marion,” interposed Mrs. Dalton’s quiet voice. “The fact of its being general is no reason for crediting it. People are always quicker to believe evil than good, I am sorry to say.”

“I suppose that is meant for me,” said Frank Morley. “But really I am not inclined, on general principles, to believe evil sooner than good. I do think, however, that some weight is to be given to a *consensus* of public opinion.”

“What a large word!” cried Helen, laughing, while Rathborne observed, with his familiar sneer:—

“A word which represents a large fact also, but a fact that must be based on knowledge in order to have any value. Now, the public opinion of Scarborough has no knowledge at all of Mr. Singleton. Therefore its decision about him has no value.”

“I am glad to hear it,” said Marion; “for I do not believe that he is either heartless or a valetudinarian.”

“I suppose he made himself agreeable to *you*,” said young Morley.

“Very agreeable,” she answered, coolly. “He informed me that we are related, and he asked me to come and sing for him alone.”

“I congratulate you on a triumph, then,” said Rathborne; “for he is a most critical person, who likes few things and tolerates few people.”

“So I judged,” she answered; “and I felt flattered accordingly.”

“How frightened I should have been of him!” exclaimed Helen. “I am very glad that my singing was not worthy of his notice!”

There was a general laugh at this, as they paused at

Mrs. Dalton's gate, where good-nights were exchanged. "I will see you to the house," said Rathborne, when his aunt declared that in the soft, bright moonlight there was no need for any one to accompany them farther; he opened the gate and went in, while the Morleys walked off.

"Frank," said Miss Morley, "what is the reason that you so often speak to Miss Lynde in a manner that sounds disagreeable and sarcastic? I don't think it is well-bred, and I never knew you guilty of speaking so to any one before."

"I never had such cause before," answered Frank. "It is the tone Miss Lynde habitually employs to *me*. You will say, perhaps, that is no excuse, but at least you will admit that it is a provocation."

"A provocation you ought to resist," said the young lady. "I am really ashamed of you? What is the reason that you positively seem to dislike each other?"

"Miss Lynde appears to think that I am a person who needs to be kept in his place by severe snubbing," replied the young man; "and I think that she is the most vain and conceited girl I ever encountered. I don't trust her an inch; and if there is not something very like a flirtation going on between Rathborne and herself, I'm mistaken."

"How can you say such a thing! Why, Paul Rathborne is as good as engaged to Helen; and, of course, her cousin knows it."

"That's neither here nor there. Whatever she knows or doesn't know, you have only to see them together to observe how well they understand each other. As for Rathborne, no treachery would surprise me in him."

“Frank, I am really shocked at you!” cried his sister. “You have let prejudice run away with your judgment. You dislike Paul Rathborne until you are ready to suspect him of anything. Of course he admires Miss Lynde — everyone does except yourself,—but that is no reason for believing that he would be treacherous to Helen. And Miss Lynde’s manner is the same to him as to everyone, so far as I have observed.”

“As far as you have observed may not be very far,” said Frank, with brotherly candor. “Wait and see — that is all.”

“I think *you* ought to wait and see before you make such charges,” returned Miss Morley. “You always disliked Paul Rathborne, and now you dislike Miss Lynde, so you suspect them both of very unworthy conduct. It shows how we ought to guard against disliking people, since to do so leads at last to unjust judgments.”

“Very fine moralizing,” remarked the young man; “but not at all applicable in this case, since I don’t suspect them because I dislike them, but I dislike them because I suspect them. There’s all the difference in the world in that.”

“It amounts to the same thing with you, I fancy,” answered his skeptical sister. “But I hope that at least you will keep your suspicions to yourself. If you breathed them to Helen —”

“Do you think I would!” he said, indignantly. “What good could it do? Helen will believe nothing against any one she loves. And she does love Rathborne — confound him!”

“Frank, you are really growing so uncharitable that

it distresses me to hear you talk," said his sister, solemnly.

Frank only responded by a laugh compounded of scorn and vexed amusement; but in his heart he knew that it was true — that he was growing uncharitable, and that he disliked Rathborne so much that he was ready to believe any ill of him. It was this dislike which had sharpened his eyes to perceive what that astute gentleman thought he was concealing from every one — the fact of the strong attraction which Marion had for him; and whoever else that fact might surprise, it did not surprise young Morley in the least. He had never believed in the disinterestedness of Rathborne's affection for Helen, and it had enraged him to perceive the trust with which his cousin gave her heart to a man unworthy of it. These sentiments had prepared him to observe any failure in the conduct of that man, and there had been a gratified sense of the justification of his own judgment when he perceived what was so far hidden from everyone else except Rathborne himself and — Marion.

For Marion was fully alive to the admiration with which Rathborne regarded her; but it is only justice to say that no thought of treachery to Helen was ever in *her* mind. Many and great as her faults might be, they were not of a mean order. By towering ambition and arrogant pride, she might fall into grievous error, but hardly into baseness — at least not by premeditation. But it is hard to say at exactly what milestone we will stop on the road of seeking the gratification and interest of self. It pleased her to see that Rathborne regarded her in a very different manner from that in which he regarded any other woman

with whom she saw him associating; the unconscious homage of his air when he approached her, of his tone when he addressed her, the choice of his subjects when he talked to her alone, were all like incense to her vanity; and it was this incense which she liked, rather than the man. Concerning the latter, she had not changed her first opinion, which did not differ very widely from that of Mr. Frank Morley.

The day after Mrs. Singleton's evening, Helen said to her cousin: "I wish so much, Marion, that you would sometimes sing in our choir! Miss Grady, our organist, said to me last night that she would be so glad if you would, and I promised to ask you."

"Why, certainly," replied Marion, with ready assent; "I shall be very glad to do so whenever you like. Catholic music is so beautiful that it is a pleasure to sing it; but I don't know much of it."

"You know that lovely '*Ave Maria*' you used to sing at the convent."

"Gounod's? Oh, yes! But when can I sing that?"

"At the Offertory in the Mass. I know Miss Grady will be delighted, for she has no really good voice. Fancy, mine is her best!"

"How modest you are!" said Marion, smiling. "Very well, then, I will sing the '*Ave Maria*' next Sunday with a great deal of pleasure, if your organist likes, and your priest does not object to a Protestant voice."

"He is not likely to do that; but I thought you always declared that you are not a Protestant."

"I suppose one must be classed as a Protestant, according to the strict sense of the term, when one is not a Catholic — and that I am not."

“But you may be some day.”

“Nothing is more unlikely. Your religion is too exacting: it puts one’s whole life in bondage. Now, I want to be free.”

“Not free to do wrong, Marion! And the only bondage which the Catholic Church lays upon people is to forbid their doing what is wrong.”

“I must be free to judge for myself what is wrong,” returned Marion, with a haughty gesture of her head. “But we had better not talk of this, Helen. We do not think alike, and I do not wish to say anything disagreeable to you.”

“Nor I to you,” said Helen; “and indeed I have no talent for argument. One needs Claire for that. Dear Claire! how I wish she were here!”

“So do I,” said Marion; “but not for purposes of argument, I confess.”

Glad to do something to please her aunt and cousin, Marion went willingly the next Sunday to the Catholic church; and, having already seen the organist—a pleasant young music teacher—accompanied Helen into the choir-loft. Here, sitting quietly in a corner during the first part of the Mass, she had time to contrast the scene before her with that which she had witnessed during the other Sundays of her stay in Scarborough. The first thing which struck her was the poverty of the small building, as compared with the luxury and beauty of the Episcopal place of worship. Here were no finely-carved and polished woods; but plain, plastered walls, relieved from bareness only by the pictures which told in simple black and white the woful story of the Cross. The sound of moving feet and scraping benches on the uncovered floor

jarred on her nerves after the subdued quiet, which was the result of carpeted aisles and pews; while the appearance of the congregation spoke plainly of humble, hard-working lives. No suggestion of social distinction and elegance was here. But in the sanctuary there was something of beauty to please even her æsthetic eye.

The small altar was beautifully dressed with freshly-cut flowers, draped with spotless linen and fine lace, and brilliant with light of wax tapers. Evidently Helen's careful hand and convent-bred taste had been there, even as Helen's pure, sweet, young voice was even now singing the angelic words of the "*Gloria.*" The priest, who was a pale and rather insignificant-looking man, certainly lacked the refined and scholarly air of the handsome young clergyman with whom Marion instinctively compared him; but there was an assured dignity in his air and gestures, as he stood at the altar, which she was too keen an observer not to perceive, and remember that the other had lacked.

In the midst of these mingled thoughts and impressions — thoughts and impressions wherein devotion had no place — she was suddenly summoned to sing. She took her place with the self-possession which never failed her, and began that beautiful strain to which Gounod has set the sacred words of the "*Ave Maria.*" There were not many musically trained ears or critically trained tastes among the congregation below, but even they turned instinctively to see what voice was rising with such divine melody toward heaven. Over and over again Marion had sung these words without thinking of their meaning, but she had never before sung them in the Mass; and now something in the

hush of the stillness around her, in the reverence of the silent people, in the solemn, stately movements of the priest and the uplifting of the chalice, seemed to fill her with a consciousness that she, too, was uttering a prayer — a prayer of such ancient and holy origin that careless lips should fear to speak it.

“*Sancta Maria, Mater Dei!*” — Never before had the wonder, the majesty, the awfulness of the Name struck her as it struck her now, when she was, as it were, the mouthpiece for all the believing hearts that so called the Blessed Maid of Israel. “*Ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostræ.*” Her voice sank over the last words with a strange sense of their meaning. The hour of our death! It would come to her, too, that hour — a sudden, intense realization of the fact seemed to run through her veins like ice, — and when it came, would it not be well to have appealed in earnest to Her who stood by the Cross, and was and is eternally the Mother of God?

Such a thought, such a question was new to this proud and worldly spirit. Why it came to her at this moment is one of the miracles of God’s grace. It was not destined to make any lasting impression; but for the time it was strong enough to cause her, when the hymn was ended, to go and kneel down in the place she had left; while from her heart rose the appeal which only her lips had uttered a moment before, “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me now and at the hour of my death.”

It gratified Helen to observe that Marion knelt with apparent devoutness during the solemn portion of the Mass; but when they came out of church, and she turned with a smile to congratulate her on her

singing, she was struck by the paleness and gravity of the beautiful face. "What is the matter?" she asked, quickly. "Has anything displeased you?"

"Displeased me!" said Marion, with a start of surprise. "No; why should you think so?"

"You look so grave."

"Do I? Perhaps I am displeased with myself, then. I did not know before that I was impressionable, and I find that I am. That vexes me. I detest impressionable people; I detest above all to feel that I myself am at the mercy of outward influences."

Helen looked all the wonder that she felt. "I don't understand what you mean," she said. "How have you found out that you are impressionable — I mean particularly so?"

Marion smiled slightly. "I am afraid you would not understand if I told you," she replied. "Or you would misunderstand, which is worse. But don't ask me to go to your church again, Helen. Something there — something about the services — affects me in a way I don't like. Nothing I should dislike so much as to become a mere emotional, susceptible creature; and I feel there as if I might."

"But, Marion," exclaimed Helen, half-shocked, half-eager, "surely our feelings are given, like everything else, to lead us to God! And, O Marion! how can you turn away from what may be the grace of God? For remember, *God Himself* was on the altar to-day!"

She uttered the last sentence in tones of reverent awe; but Marion frowned impatiently.

"It was because I knew you would not understand that I did not want to speak," she said. "What I

am talking of is a mere matter of susceptibility to outward influences. It is disagreeable to me, and I do not wish to subject myself to it — that is all. I am never troubled in that way at the Episcopal services," she added, more lightly. "I shall go there in future."

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was not very long before Marion's promise to Mr. Singleton was recalled to her mind — if, indeed, that could be said to be recalled which had never been forgotten. For she had not exaggerated in saying that this old man, with his air of the world, with his keen, critical glance, and the mingled imperativeness and courtliness of his manner, was after her own taste. His evident admiration and appreciation of herself no doubt led greatly to this result; for had she been treated as he was in the habit of treating people whom he did not like, there could hardly have been much liking on her side. But since his approval of *her* was very manifest, her approval of *him* was not less so; and was, moreover, sharpened by the restless ambition which made her look eagerly for any opening by which she might gain her desired ends.

She was glad, therefore, to receive one morning a note from Mrs. Singleton, begging to know if that day would suit her for the fulfillment of her promise to sing for Mr. Singleton alone. "I should have asked *you* to name the day," the note went on, "but for the fact that there are only certain days on which my uncle feels equal to the exertion of seeing any

one; and, of course, he wishes to see as well as to hear you. If you have no other engagement for this afternoon, will you, then, gratify him by coming at five o'clock? And I hope to keep you to spend the evening with me."

Had any engagement interfered with the proposed appointment, there is no doubt that Marion would have broken it like a thread; but she was, happily, free from such a necessity, and had only to tell Mrs. Singleton that she would accept her invitation for the afternoon with pleasure. So, at the time appointed, her aunt's carriage dropped her at the door of the house which the Singletons had taken for the season. It was by far the handsomest house in Scarborough — wide, spacious, stately, with nobly proportioned rooms, and halls that spoke eloquently of the wealth that had planned them. It was a wealth that had vanished now, as the house had passed out of the possession of those who built it; but the fine old place served admirably as a setting for the Singleton establishment, which was formed on a very lavish scale.

When Marion was shown into the drawing-room, she found Mr. Singleton there, established in a deep easy-chair near the piano, with an open newspaper before him. He laid it on his knee when she entered, and held out his hand.

"You will excuse my keeping my seat," he said, as she came toward him. "I rise with great difficulty, owing to obstinate sciatica, and never without assistance. But you must believe that I appreciate your kindness in coming."

"I am very glad to come," she said, with cordial sincerity. "I told you that it would be a pleasure to

me. I like to sing, especially to one who knows what good singing is; and whose praise, therefore, has value."

He smiled, evidently well pleased. "And how do you know," he said, "that my praise has that value?"

"One can tell such things very quickly," she replied. "I think I should have known that you possessed musical culture even if I had not heard so."

"I have a good deal of musical knowledge, at least," he said. "In my youth I lived much abroad, and I have heard all the great singers of the world. It has been a passion with me, and I have missed nothing else so much during these later years of invalidism. You can judge, therefore, whether or not it is a pleasure to hear such a voice as yours."

"I know that my voice is good," said Marion; "but I also know how much it lacks cultivation. I fear that must jar on you, since you have heard so many great singers."

"No, it does not jar on me, because you have no bad tricks. You sing simply and naturally, with wonderful sweetness and power. Sing now, and afterward I will take the liberty of asking you some questions about yourself."

Marion went to the piano, and, animated by the last words, sang as well as she could possibly have sung for a much larger audience. In the lofty, wide room she let out the full power of her splendid voice with an ease, a total absence of effort, which delighted her listener. Lying back in his deep chair while song followed song, and marking how clear and true every note rang, his interest in the singer grew; and he began to rouse a little from the state of indifferent

egoism which was normal with him, to consider what would be the future of this girl, whom nature had so richly endowed. Perhaps curiosity had a part in the interest; at least when Marion had sung for some time, he said suddenly: —

“That is enough for the present. I must not be unreasonable, and I must not let you strain your voice. Will you come now and talk to me for a while?”

“Willingly,” she answered, rising from the instrument with a smile. “But you must remember that it does not follow that because I can entertain you by singing I can also entertain you by talking.”

“I think it will follow,” he said. “You talk, if not as well as you sing — for that would be very extraordinary — at least well enough to make me desire to listen to you. And in order to make you appreciate that, I must tell you that the talking of most people bores me intolerably.”

“Are there any signs by which one can tell when one begins to bore you?” asked Marion, sitting down on a low chair in front of him. “Because I should like to cease as soon as that point is reached.”

He smiled, all the lines of his face relaxing as he looked at her. In fact, he found the charm of her beauty almost as great as that of her voice. Had it been an unintellectual beauty, he would have cared nothing for it; but the flash of that indescribable quality which the French call *esprit*, the quickness and readiness of her speech, the grace of her manner, — all pleased and interested the man, who was not easily pleased or interested.

“I do not believe there is any danger of your ever reaching that point,” he said. “And I think you are

sure of it yourself. You have no fear of boring any one; for you know the thing is impossible."

"You are very kind," she answered. "But I have never observed that the people who bore one are at all afraid of doing it. So, lack of fear would not prove exemption from the possibility. But I flatter myself that I have penetration enough to detect the first sign, and I am certain that I would not need to detect the second."

"Any one who saw you would be certain of that," he said, regarding her intently. "As it chances, however, it may be I who will prove the bore; for I am going to claim one of the privileges of an old man, and ask you some questions about yourself; or, to spare me the trouble of asking the question, I should like for you to tell me something about your life, if you have no objection."

"Not the slightest," replied Marion; "indeed your interest flatters me. But I am sorry to say that there is very little to tell. You see, my life is only beginning."

"True. You have just left school, I believe?"

"Only a few weeks ago. I came then with my cousin from the convent, where I had spent two years."

"You are not a Roman Catholic, I hope?"

"Oh! no, certainly not." It occurred to her, as she spoke, that if he should ask what she was, she would not be prepared with so ready an answer. But his interest was apparently satisfied with ascertaining what she was *not*, and he went on to another question:—

"Where is your home?"

"Ah! that is difficult to answer," she said. "Be-

fore going to the convent, I lived with my uncle, but I could hardly call that home; and, since I have no desire to return to his house, I must reply with strict correctness that I have no home."

"That is a sad statement for one so young. Is not your uncle your guardian?"

"I suppose that he is; but, you see, I have no fortune to look after—somehow it has all vanished away,—and, personally, I am not very much in need of a guardian."

"Permit me to differ with you there," said Mr. Singleton, gravely. "Personally, I think that you are very much in need of a guardian. And by that I do not mean any reflection on your power of conducting yourself—which I have no doubt is very sufficient,—but I mean that no young and beautiful woman of good social rank should be without the protection of such guardianship."

"I presume certainly that my uncle considers himself my guardian, and it is likely that he has legal power to interfere with my actions," said Marion. "But I think he does not feel interest enough to interfere—unless he thought me likely to bring discredit on the family. And I believe he knows me well enough not to fear that."

Mr. Singleton smiled at the unconscious pride of her tone, and the gesture with which she lifted her head. "One need not know you very well in order to be sure of that," he said. "But, since these are your circumstances, allow me, as your kinsman, to ask another question. What are your plans for the future?"

She opened her hands with a gesture signifying emptiness, and slightly shrugged her shoulders.

“ Frankly, I have none,” she answered. “ I am waiting on fate. Don’t think that I mind it,” she added, quickly, catching an expression on his face. “ It is interesting — it is like waiting for a play to begin. If I had my choice, I should prefer the uncertainties of my life to a life already mapped and arranged like that of my cousin, Helen Morley. Why should uncertainty of the future daunt one who has a consciousness of some powers, and has no fear at all? I am only anxious for the play to begin, that is all.”

“ Poor child ! ” said her listener. The words were uttered involuntarily, and startled him a little ; for he was not easily moved to sympathy or compassion. But the very dauntlessness of this courage, the very rashness of this self-confidence, were sad to the man who knew so well the pitfalls of life, the dangers which no powers could avert, no bravery overcome. If Marion had subtly calculated how best to rouse his interest, and touch whatever heart remained to him in the midst of the gradual withering up of the springs of feeling, she could not have succeeded better, nor probably half so well. Any appeal to his sympathy, any tearful eyes or supplicating tones, he would have resisted ; but this proud daring of fate, this quick rejection of pity, moved him more than, beforehand, he would have imagined possible. When conscious of the words which had escaped him, he went on :—

“ Pardon me, but I have known so long the life you are just beginning — indeed I am about to leave the stage as you make your *début*,—that I fear the play may not prove all that you fancy. It is apt to take sudden turns which no skill can foresee, and which force one, whether one will or not, into very

unpleasant situations. But I have no inclination to act the part of a prophet of ill, so I hope all this may be reversed for you; certainly so much courage and so much beauty ought to propitiate Fate. And, meanwhile, if there is anything I can do to serve you, remember that I am your kinsman, and let me know."

"Thank you," said Marion, graciously. "But while waiting for the play to begin, I have nothing to desire. My friends are very kind. And now I fear that I may have reached that point of which we spoke earlier — the point of possible boredom. At least I know that I have talked too much of myself."

"Not at all," he replied, quickly. "You have only answered my questions; and I have been, I fear, too inquisitive. But my interest in you must plead my excuse. I suppose I have been more ready to gratify it because it is not easily roused — at least not to the degree in which you have roused it."

"That is very pleasant for me to hear," said Marion, truthfully. "I like to rouse interest — everyone does, I imagine; and yet I should not care for it if it were easily roused."

"No, I imagine not," said he, with a look that seemed to read her through and through. "You will care only for difficult things, and you are made to gain them."

Before Marion could express her approval of this prophecy, the sound of approaching footsteps was heard, and Mrs. Singleton entered the room, in the freshest and prettiest of evening toilets. She held out both hands to Marion, with an air of effusion.

"I was roused out of my *siesta* by the most delightful sounds!" she cried. "At first I thought it

must be an angel singing, but angels are not in the habit of visiting me; so then I remembered your appointment, and that I had intended to be present to share the pleasure with uncle. Unfortunately I slept too long for that, but you will sing some for me now — or perhaps we had better defer it until later, when Tom can have the pleasure too. You remember that you are going to spend the evening with us.”

Marion remembered, and was very willing to do so; for these were people whom she liked to cultivate. They were not only people of high social consideration, who might be useful to her, but their knowledge of the world, their familiarity with society abroad as well as at home, and their easy habits of wealth and luxury, pleased her taste and gratified her own instinctive yearning for these things. The quiet, old-fashioned comfort of her aunt's establishment lost all its charm when contrasted with the fashion and lavish expenditure which were here. She was the only guest at the beautifully served dinner to which they sat down in the summer gloaming; but she could truly assure Mrs. Singleton that she was glad it was so. “Who could be found in Scarborough as entertaining as yourselves?” she asked.

“How very nice of you to say so!” replied that lady, patting her hand. “Then we are very well satisfied; for I am sure nobody could be found in Scarborough as entertaining as you are. In fact, you do not belong to the Scarborough order of life at all; you are totally out of place here.”

Marion laughed. “I am afraid I feel so occasionally,” she said; “but I have an idea that it is my fault: that I expect too much of Scarborough.”

“You belong to another life altogether,” repeated Mrs. Singleton, positively. “I felt sure of it the first time I saw you. A quiet, sociable, country-town existence may suit other people — your pretty cousin, for example, — but it does not suit *you*.”

“That is very true,” said Marion. “As a matter of taste, it certainly does not suit me; but I learned early that one cannot always expect to have one’s tastes gratified.”

“You are very philosophical. Now, for me, I always expect to have my tastes gratified, and they generally are. Demand a great deal and you will get at least some of it; that is my philosophy.”

“And, unlike many philosophers, you always practice what you preach. That I can testify,” said Mr. Singleton (the husband). “Don’t let her demoralize you, Miss Lynde. If you have any moderation of desire, by all means keep and culture it.”

“Unfortunately, my desires are boundless,” replied Marion, smiling. “It is only my expectations which are moderate.”

“Well, that is remarkable enough,” said the gentleman; “if only you can manage to keep them so — but you will not.”

“Why not?”

He cast a glance into an opposite mirror. “About the best reason I offer is to be found there,” he answered. “No woman is going to expect less than Nature gave her a right to demand.”

And so on all sides fresh fuel was offered to the vanity which already turned high and strong in dangerous flame.

CHAPTER IX.

SEVERAL weeks passed, during which the acquaintance of Marion with the Singletons progressed rapidly to intimacy—such intimacy, that Helen protested more than once that her cousin spent more time with Mrs. Singleton than with herself. She was certainly very often the companion of that lady—seen by her side in the pretty phaeton which she drove, met at all her entertainments, called upon for all occasions when she needed assistance, social or otherwise. The vaguely understood link of relationship between them served as an excuse for this, had any excuse been required beside the caprice of the elder and the inclination of the younger lady. “I have discovered a cousin in Miss Lynde,” Mrs. Singleton would say to her Scarborough acquaintances. “Do you not think that I am very fortunate?” And there were few who did not reply honestly that they considered her very fortunate indeed.

But the person who regarded this association most approvingly was old Mr. Singleton, since it secured him a great deal of Marion’s society, for which he evinced a partiality. It was, in fact, to this partiality that Marion owed Mrs. Singleton’s attentions. “Your uncle has taken a most extraordinary fancy to that girl, Tom,” she said to her husband at a very early

stage of the acquaintance; "so I think that I had better cultivate her. It will be better for me to use her as a means to contribute to his amusement than to let her develop into a power against us. There is no counting on the whims of an old man, you know."

"Especially of *this* old man," assented Mr. Singleton. "He is capable of anything. Therefore I don't think I would have the girl about too much."

"It is better for me to have her about than for him to take her up. If he considers her my *protégée*, he will not be so likely to make her his own. I have given the matter some thought, and that is the way I look at it."

"You may be right," said easy-going Mr. Singleton. "I have great confidence in your way of looking at things, and of managing them too. But I confess that I have no confidence in this handsome and clever young lady. I don't think she would hesitate to play one any trick."

"Confidence in *her!*" said Mrs. Singleton, with scorn. "Of course I have not a particle. But she will have no opportunity to play me a trick. Be sure of that."

Meanwhile Helen said to Marion, rather doubtfully: "Marion, do you really like Mrs. Singleton very much? She is very pleasant and very elegant, but somehow—I hope I am not uncharitable—I never feel as if one could thoroughly trust her."

"My dear," replied Marion, with her mocking smile, "do you know, or fancy that you know, many people whom you can 'thoroughly trust'? If so, you are more fortunate than I am; for I have known only one or two in my life."

“O Marion! no more than that? How can you be so unjust to your friends?”

“I have no friends, in the true sense of the term, except you and Claire. I trust *you*.”

“I hope so, and I you — most thoroughly.”

Marion regarded her with something like wonder. “Now, why,” she said, dispassionately, “should you trust me? I am sure I have never shown a character to inspire that sentiment.”

“You delight in showing your worst side,” answered Helen; “but it does not deceive me. I know that the worst is not as bad as you would have it believed to be, and that the best exists all the time.”

“It certainly exists for you, and always will,” said Marion, quickly. “There is nothing I could not sooner do than betray your trust.”

“How can you even hint such a thing!” exclaimed Helen, indignantly. “Do you think I could ever fear it?”

“No,” replied Marion; “I am sure that you would never fear it from any one whom you love. But you may have to suffer it some day, nevertheless.”

The speaker’s tone had more significance than she intended, and Helen looked at her with a glance of sudden apprehension. “What do you mean?” she asked. “Why should I fear it?”

“Why should any of us fear that we will have to share in the common lot — the common knowledge of evil as well as of good?” said Marion, evasively. “We must all expect it; at least that is one of the pleasant things we are told.”

“Oh! yes, I suppose we must expect it,” said Helen. “But expecting a thing in a general way,

and doubting any — any one in particular, is a very different matter.”

The conversation ended here; but the mere fact that she had been so quick to take alarm might have told Helen that, unconsciously to herself, suspicion had taken some root in her mind. The readiness with which she put herself into an attitude of defense showed that she feared attack. And, indeed, she had already suffered more than one attack on the subject of Rathborne — if that could be called attack which was only the expression of a gentle doubt, first from her mother, and then from the priest, who, distrusting all such marriages in general, had special reasons for distrusting this one in particular. Like most priests, he had many sources of information; many streams flowed, as it were, into the silent reservoir of his mind; and in this way things concerning Rathborne had come to his knowledge, which rendered him deeply averse to seeing Helen link her pure young life with that of a man so unscrupulous and selfish. Loath to give pain if unable to achieve any practical good thereby, he had spoken very guardedly to her when she sought his counsel; but, perhaps because he spoke with so much caution, his words sank deeply into her mind, and left a sense of weight behind. But it was one of her characteristics that, after once reposing confidence in a person, she could not lightly recall it; and she clung to Rathborne more closely for the opposition which she attributed to mistaken judgment.

Nevertheless, Helen was already learning something of what Marion called the common lot; — she was acquiring some knowledge of the difficulty of reconciling

conflicting desires, and of the impossibility of finding things made smooth and easy. Now and then there was a wistful look in her eyes, which touched her mother deeply, and made her ready to consent to anything which would restore sunshine to one who seemed so wholly made to enjoy it.

But Mrs. Dalton was not blind to one fact, which may or may not have been clear to Helen, — the significant fact that Rathborne had not, since the return home of her daughter, pressed his suit with his former ardor. He had not begged that the conditional and merely tolerated engagement should be converted into an open and positive one; he seemed quite satisfied with matters as they stood, and took Helen's sentiments entirely too much for granted, so Helen's mother thought. What to do, however, she did not clearly perceive, and Father Barrett strongly advised a policy of inaction. "Let matters take their own course," he said. "I am of opinion that Helen may be spared what you fear most for her; but this cannot be brought about by any effort of yours, which would tend, on the contrary, to rouse opposition. If the child must suffer, in any event do not let her have the additional pain of thinking that she owes any of the suffering to you."

To this counsel Mrs. Dalton gave heed — or thought she did. But many things betrayed to Helen that her mother's disapproval of Rathborne's suit had not lessened with time. Anxious to avoid any possible conflict, the girl shrank from broaching the subject; but it was a growing pain to her affectionate nature that there should be a subject — and that the nearest her heart and life — in which she was not sure of

her mother's sympathy — where her deepest feelings might yet be arrayed against each other, and a difficult choice be made necessary.

To Marion, meantime, Rathborne had become somewhat troublesome. As we learn in many an old legend that it is easier to raise a fiend than to put him down, so she found it easier to make the impression which she had desired than to regulate the effect of that impression. She had made it with the utmost ease,— an ease very flattering to her vanity ; but, innocent as she had been of any intention save that of gratifying vanity, retribution followed hard upon her steps. Apart from the fact that she was incapable of deliberately betraying Helen's confidence, she trusted Rathborne no further than most other people did. Moreover, her arrogance of spirit was as great as her ambition, and she considered herself fitted for a position much higher than he could possibly offer her — had she believed him ready to offer anything. But, so far from believing this, she gave him no credit for any sincerity of intention toward her, knowing well that self-interest was the sole rule of his life. "He dares to think that he can amuse himself with me and then marry Helen!" she thought. "There may be two who can play at that game. Let us see!"

The thought that it was a very dangerous game did not occur to her; or, if it occurred, did not deter her. At this time of her life she had only a sense of worldly honor to deter her from anything which she desired to do; and she desired most sincerely to punish the man whom she believed to be true neither to Helen nor herself. Therefore, although his attentions began to annoy her, she did not discourage

them, notwithstanding that she noted scornfully how he avoided, as far as possible, devoting himself to her when he was likely to be observed. But his precautions had not saved him, as we are aware, from the keen observation of Frank Morely; and Mrs. Dalton herself, with eyes sharpened by a mother's anxiety, began to perceive that Marion possessed a great attraction for him.

Matters were in this by no means satisfactory state when Mrs. Singleton, growing weary of other forms of amusement, decided to patronize Nature. There was a great deal of beautiful scenery in the vicinity of Scarborough, which she declared had been too long neglected. "A picnic is horrid!" she said. "The very word is full of vulgar associations, and the thing itself is tiresome beyond expression. One would grow weary of the most delightful people in the world if doomed to spend a whole day in the woods with them. But a few hours in the pleasantest part of the day — that is another matter. A gypsy tea is just the thing! We will go out in the afternoon to Elk Ridge, have tea, look at the sunset, and return by moonlight; is not that a good idea?"

"Excellent," said the persons whom she addressed — a party of five or six who had been dining with her. "It will make a very pleasant excursion, only we must be sure of the moon."

"Oh! we have only to consult the almanac for that," said the lively hostess. "I think there is a new moon due about this time."

Marion laughed, and, touching the arm of old Mr. Singleton, by whom she sat, pointed out of a western window to the evening sky, where hung the beautiful

crescent of the moon, framed between the arching boughs of tall trees.

“Hum — yes,” observed that gentleman. “Anna’s attention to Nature is altogether controlled by the question of whether or not it can be made to contribute to her amusement. Now that the moon has arrived, it will not be long before the gypsy tea takes place.”

And, indeed, in a few days all arrangements for this festivity were completed, the party made up, and the programme settled. Mrs. Singleton wished that Marion should accompany her; but Helen protested so much against this that the arrangement was changed; and it was finally settled that Marion and herself, with Rathborne and Morley, would make up a *parti carré* in a light open carriage.

There is nothing more attractive to youth, nothing more suited to its natural lightness of heart and spirit, than such pleasures as these — golden afternoons in summer woods and under summer skies; sunsets when all nature is flooded with beauty, like a crystal cup filled to the brim; and nights of spiritual, entrancing loveliness. Even with older persons, the sense of care seems lifted from the mind for a little time among such scenes; while to the young and happy, care is a thing impossible to realize when earth itself is transformed into Arcadia.

So Helen felt as she started on this excursion. In some subtle fashion, the doubts which had weighed upon her for a considerable time past were lifted. She did not say to herself that she had been foolish, for she was little given to self-analysis; but involuntarily she felt it, involuntarily she threw off the

shadow which had fallen over her, and grasped the pleasure offered, as a child puts out its hand to grasp sunbeams. When they drove away, her heart was as light as a feather, her face as bright as the day, and she turned back to wave her hand in gay farewell to her mother.

CHAPTER X.

ELK RIDGE, the place selected by Mrs. Singleton for her gypsy tea, was a very picturesque and beautiful locality, distant seven miles from Scarborough. The drive there, through the soft, golden beauty of the August afternoon, was delightful; and the beauties of the height when reached well repaid any exertion that might have been necessary to gain it. Since none was necessary, however, it proved a great surprise to those who had not been there before to find themselves on a noble eminence, crowned by splendid masses of rock, and commanding a most extensive view of the smiling country around and the blue mountains in the distance. It was an ideal spot for *al fresco* amusements, and the party assembled were in the mood to enjoy it.

Very soon a kettle was hung from crossed sticks over a blazing fire; and while the water was boiling, and the arrangements for tea in progress, all those who were not actively engaged in these arrangements scattered over the summit, admiring the view, and now and then climbing some of the more accessible of the great granite boulders. Among the last were Helen and Frank Morley, both in high spirits, and laughing like a pair of merry children. Marion shrugged her shoulders over their exploits.

“I have never been young enough for that,” she said to Rathborne. “I could never, at any stage of existence, see the ‘fun’ of risking one’s neck.”

“It is childish!” he responded, with ill-concealed contempt. He had endeavored to dissuade Helen, but for once she had been deaf to his remonstrances. Her spirits were so high this afternoon that an outlet for them was indispensable; and she was still so much of a child that this special outlet of physical exertion and daring was very agreeable to her.

“I suppose it is a good thing to be childish now and then,” said Marion. “I don’t think *I* ever was; and, no doubt, it is so much the worse for me.”

“On the contrary, I think, so much the better,” replied Rathborne. “Where there is childishness there must be folly, and I cannot imagine you guilty of that.”

“Can you not?” She paused an instant and seemed to reflect. “But there are things worse than folly,” she said, with one of her sudden impulses of candor; “and I might be guilty of some of them.”

“Oh! you might—yes.” He laughed. “So might I. Perhaps for that reason I have more sympathy with them than with folly.”

Marion gave him a glance which he did not understand nor yet altogether fancy. “Yes,” she said, “I am very sure you have more sympathy with what is bad than with what is foolish.”

Before he could reply to such an equivocal speech, Mrs. Singleton sent a messenger for Miss Lynde to come and help her pour out tea; and the young lady rose and walked away.

It was very gay and bright and pleasant, that

gypsy tea among the rocks, with depths of verdure overhead and far-stretching beauty of outspread country below. The amber sunshine streamed over the scene; pretty pale-blue smoke, from the fire over which the kettle hung, mounted in the air; there was a musical chatter of tongues and sound of laughter. At such times and in such scenes it is difficult for the most thoughtful to realize the great sadness of the world, the care that encompasses life, and the pain that overshadows it. But these light hearts were never at any time troubled with the realization of such things. They were all young and, for the most part, prosperous; life went easily with them, and nothing seemed more remote than trouble or unhappiness. The hours sped lightly by, as such hours do, and presently it was time to think of returning. The sun sank into his golden bed, the moon would soon rise majestically in the east, and the drive back to Scarborough would be as delightful as the drive out had been.

But just before the move for departure was made Rathborne came to Marion and said: "You have not yet seen the finest view — that from the other side of the Ridge. Would you not like to walk over there and look at it?"

"I think not," replied Marion, who did not care for a *tête-à-tête* with him. "I am not very fond of views."

"O but, Marion, this view is really fine!" cried Helen, eagerly. "Pray go; you will be repaid for the exertion"

Not caring to make her refusal more marked, Marion rose with an inward sense of vexation. "Very well, then," she said to Rathborne; "since Helen is sure I

will be repaid for the exertion, I will go; but, since I am not sure, I hope the exertion required is not very much."

"It is only that of walking about a hundred yards," he answered. And as they turned and followed a well-defined path, which led among the rocks and trees, he added, "I do not mean, however, to insist upon any exertion which would be disagreeable to you."

Marion might truthfully have answered that it was not the exertion which was disagreeable to her; but she had no desire to make an enemy of this man, and instinct told her that whoever wounded his vanity was thenceforth to him an enemy. So she replied lightly that she was very indolent, especially where the beauties of nature were concerned; but that she had no doubt the view would repay her after she reached it.

"I think it will," said Rathborne; "otherwise I should not have proposed your coming."

And indeed even Marion, who was right in saying that the beauties of nature did not greatly appeal to her, was moved by the loveliness and extent of the view suddenly spread before her, when they came to the verge of the Ridge, on the other side, where the hill broke off in a sheer precipice. The great rock-face of this precipice shelved downward to a soft, pastoral valley, beyond which were belts of encircling woodlands, green hills rising into bolder heights as they receded, and a distant range of azure mountains fair as hills of paradise.

"Oh! this *is* glorious!" cried Marion, involuntarily, as the broad scene, with the long, golden lights and beautiful shadows of late evening falling across it, was suddenly revealed by an abrupt turn in the path.

She walked to the edge of the precipice and stood there, with hands lightly clasped, looking into the far, magical distance. At this moment, as in other moments like it, something stirred in her nature deeper and nobler than its ordinary impulses. She had a consciousness of possibilities which at other times were remote from her realization,—possibilities of loftier action and feeling, of a higher standard, of a loftier aim than her life had known. It was a state of feeling not unlike that which came to her in the Catholic church, and she shrank from it. By this grand arch of bending, lucid sky, by those distant heavenly heights with their mystical suggestions, thoughts were roused in her which seemed in little accord with the other thoughts of her life. She forgot for a moment the man who stood beside her, and started when he spoke.

“It repays you — I see that,” he said. “And so I am repaid for bringing you.”

“Yes, it is very beautiful,” she answered, slowly; “but I am not sure that I am obliged to you for bringing me here. It produces in me feelings that I do not like.”

“What kind of feelings?” inquired Rathborne, curiously.

She swept him with a quick glance from under her half-drooped eyelids, and he had again the impression that it conveyed something of contempt.

“If I could define them,” she said, “I doubt if you would be able to understand them. I am certain that you have never felt anything of the kind.”

“Why should you be certain of that?” he asked, a little irritated as well by her tone as by her glance.

“You do not surely think that you have gauged all my possibilities of feeling.”

“I have made no attempt to do so,” she said, indifferently. “Why should I? But one receives some impressions instinctively.”

“And you think, perhaps, that I have no feeling,” he replied quickly; “that I am cold and hard and selfish, and altogether a calculating machine. But you are mistaken. I was all that once — I frankly confess it, — but since I have known you, I have changed. I have learned what it is to feel in the deepest manner.”

There was a short silence. Marion’s heart gave a great bound and then seemed to stand still. A fear which she had striven to put away was now a horrible certainty. She had played with fire, and the moment of scorching was come — come to desecrate a place which she had felt to be a sanctuary filled with the consciousness of God. Her first impulse was to turn and go away without a word; her next, to utter words as scornful as her mood.

“If I am mistaken, so are you, Mr. Rathborne,” she said, — “exceedingly mistaken in imagining that I have given any thought to your feelings, or that I am in the faintest degree interested in them.”

Her tone stung him like the stroke of a whip, and roused a passion on which she had not calculated. He took a few hasty steps toward her; and she found herself prisoned between the precipice on one side, and this man, who stood and looked at her with eyes that gleamed under his frowning brow.

“Do you mean to tell me,” he said, peremptorily, “that you have no interest in feelings which you have deliberately excited and encouraged? Do you mean

to say that you have meant nothing when by every art in your power you have led me on to love you?"

Surely retribution was very heavy upon Marion at that moment. The injustice of the charge — for of any such intention her conscience acquitted her — only added to her sense of angry humiliation, and to the consciousness, which she could not ignore, that she had, in some degree at least, brought this upon herself. Her indignation was so deep, her anger so great, that for once her readiness of speech failed, and she could only reply:

“How dare you address me in this manner?”

He laughed — a short, bitter laugh, not pleasant to hear. “You are a good actor, Miss Lynde,” he said. “I never doubted your capacity in that line; but I see that it is even greater than I imagined. How dare I address you with the truth! Why should I not? You have made me believe that you desired nothing more than to hear it. Your manner to me, since the first evening we met, has admitted of but one interpretation — that you wished to excite the feeling I have not hesitated to show you. And so long as I merely *showed* it, you were pleased; but now that I utter it, you profess an indignation which it is impossible you can feel.”

“You are speaking falsely!” cried Marion, whose anger was now so excessive that no words seemed strong enough to express it. “I have never for one instant wished to encourage the feeling of which you speak. I knew you were engaged to Helen, and I thought you something, at least, of a gentleman. I now see that you have no claim whatever to that title. Let me pass!”

“No,” he said — and now he extended his hand and caught her wrist in a vise-like grasp. “I have no doubt, from the proficiency you exhibit, that you have played this game before with success; but you shall not have the pleasure of playing it successfully with me. In one way or another, I will make it a costly game to you, unless you tell me that all this affected indignation means nothing, and that if I end my entanglement with Helen, you will marry me.”

“Let me go!” said Marion, pale and breathless with passion. “If you were free as air — if you had never been engaged to Helen — I would not think of marrying you! Is that enough?”

“Quite enough,” he answered — but still he did not release her wrist. “Now listen to me. I am not a man with whom any woman — not even one so clever as you are — can amuse herself with impunity. I do not mean to be melodramatic; I shall not curse you for your deception, for the heartlessness with which you have sacrificed me to your vanity; but I warn you that you have made an enemy who will leave nothing undone to pay his debt. I read you very thoroughly, beautiful and unscrupulous schemer that you are; and I promise you that in the hour when you think your schemes are nearest success, you will find them defeated by me. To that I pledge myself.”

There is something terrible in feeling one's self the object of hatred, even if that hatred be both undeserved and impotent; and, brave as Marion was, proud and defiant as she was, she felt herself shiver under these words, and under the gaze which seconded them. What, indeed, if she had made a mistake on the very threshold of the life in which she had ex-

pected to manage so well. What if, instead of making a satisfactory test of her power, she had roused an enmity which even her experience knew to be more powerful and more tireless than love? She did not quail under the fiery gaze bent on her, but her heart sank with a sense of apprehension, of which she was strong enough to give no outward sign.

“It is a very worthy object to which you pledge yourself,” she observed, with scorn. “But I am not afraid of a man who is cowardly enough to threaten a woman with his enmity because she rejects and despises what he calls his love.”

Her voice had always a peculiar quality of clearness in speaking, but when she was at all excited it was like silver in its resonance. Therefore the words distinctly reached the ears of one who was coming toward them, and the next instant Helen’s pale face and startled eyes rose before her.

She uttered a sharp exclamation, which stopped the words that were rising to Rathborne’s lips; and, wrenching her arm from his grasp, she sprang forward to her cousin’s side. “Helen!” she cried, unconscious almost of what she said, “what are you doing here?”

It is not always the people who seem most weak whom emergency proves to be so. At this moment Helen exhibited a self-control which would have surprised even those who knew her best. She was pale as marble, and her violet eyes had still their startled, piteous look; but she answered, quietly:—

“I came to look for you. It was foolish—I will go back now. Don’t trouble to come with me.”

But as she turned, Marion seized her arm.

“Helen!” she exclaimed, “don’t misjudge me! Don’t think that this is my fault!”

“No,” replied Helen, with the same strange quietness; “I heard what you said. I don’t blame — any one. I suppose it was natural.”

Then it was Rathborne’s turn. “Helen,” he said, coming up to her, and speaking with an attempt at the old tone of authority; “you must listen to *me*.”

But she turned away from him with something like a shudder. “No,” she said, “do not ask me — not now. I may be weak, but not so weak as not to understand — this. Don’t come with me. Frank will look after me and take me home. That is all I want.”

She moved away through the beautiful greenery, a slender, lovely figure, with drooping head; and the two whom she left behind watched her with one sensation at least in common — that of a keen sense of guilt, which for the moment no other feeling was strong enough to stifle.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Marion returned to the party, who were preparing for their homeward drive, Frank Morley came up to her with a very grave face.

“Helen tells me that she is feeling so bad, Miss Lynde,” he said, coldly, “that she wishes me to take her home. I have, therefore, arranged for our return in the buggy in which Netta came out, and she and her escort will take our places in the carriage with you.”

“Make whatever arrangement you please,” answered Marion, as coldly as himself; “but pray leave me out of it. There is a vacant seat in Mrs. Singleton’s carriage, which I shall take for the return.”

“Very well — the matter, is settled, then,” he said. “I will take Helen away at once.” And he walked off with a scant courtesy, which his youth and indignation excused.

But it was a new sensation to Marion to be treated with discourtesy by any one; and she had to pull herself together with an effort before she was able to approach Mrs. Singleton in her usual manner, and announce that she was willing to take the seat she had before declined.

“I don’t like to repeat anything, not even a drive,

in exactly the same manner," she said by way of explanation; "so if you will allow me, I will join you for the homeward drive."

"I shall be delighted to have you," answered Mrs. Singleton. "I thought you would do better to come with me. Tom will be delighted, too. You shall sit with him, and drive if he will let you."

Good-natured Mr. Singleton was much pleased to share his box seat with such a companion, and even to make over the reins to her whenever the road was good enough to allow of it with safety; while to Marion there was distraction from her own thoughts — from the recollection of unpleasant complications, and the sense of angry humiliation — in guiding the spirited horses, that tried all the strength of her arms and wrists, and required an undivided attention.

However, the drive was soon over, and then she had before her the disagreeable necessity of facing her aunt and Helen. Brave as she was, she was assailed by a cowardly impulse to avoid meeting them. What if she went home with Mrs. Singleton, and for the evening at least did not meet them? But what would be gained by that, except delay? She knew that unless she wished to leave it in Rathborne's power to make what statement he chose, she *must* go to them with her own statement; and, this being so, delay would serve no end except to give the impression of heartless indifference. No, there was nothing for it but to meet at once what had to be met sooner or later; so when the Singleton carriage drew up at her aunt's gate, she exchanged a gay farewell with her companions, and with a heavy heart and reluctant step took her way to the house.

How different from its usual aspect that house looked, as she drew near it! Usually at this hour bright lights shone from the windows; there would be snatches of music, sounds of voices and laughter; if the moon were shining as to-night, a gay party would be assembled on the veranda. Now it was still and quiet; the lights in the drawing-room were turned low; the broad, open hall looked deserted. Only one figure emerged from the shadow of the vines on the veranda into the full moonlight as she approached. It was a small figure — that of Harry Dalton.

“Why, Harry!” exclaimed Marion, with an effort to speak as usual, “are you all alone? Where is Helen?”

“Helen has gone upstairs; she has a headache,” answered Harry. “But mamma is in the sitting-room, and wants to see you.”

“Very well,” said Marion. She began to unbutton her gloves, as some outward relief to her inward agitation, and without pausing, walked into the house. Since the interview must take place, the sooner it was over the better — so she said to herself as she entered the room where her aunt awaited her.

Mrs. Dalton was sitting by a table on which stood a shaded lamp, and, with a book open before her, seemed to be reading; but her effort to fix her mind on the page had not met with much success. She had, in reality, been waiting for the sound of her niece’s step; and when she heard her coming, she was conscious of as much shrinking from the interview as Marion felt. “I must be reasonable,” she said to herself; and then, pushing back her volume, she looked up as the girl entered.

It was characteristic of Marion that she spoke first. "I am sorry to hear that Helen is not well, aunt," she said. "Has she been at home long?"

"About half an hour," answered Mrs. Dalton. "She has gone to her room; she asked that she might be left alone. That is so unlike Helen, that I am sure something very serious has occurred. And I judge from a few words which Frank said, that you know what it is, Marion."

"What did Mr. Frank Morley say?" inquired Marion, sitting down. The introduction of his name roused in her an immediate sense of defiance. After all, what right had they to suppose that what had happened was any fault of hers?

"He said that Helen had overheard something which passed between Paul Rathborne and yourself," answered Mrs. Dalton; "and that afterward she had asked him to bring her home alone. He told me this in reply to my questions. Helen said nothing; but I feel that I ought to know how matters stand, so I ask you what did she overhear?"

"She overheard me tell Mr. Rathborne that I rejected and despised the love that he ventured to offer me," replied Marion, speaking in her clearest and most distinct tone.

A quick contraction of the brow showed how much the answer pained, if it did not surprise, Mrs. Dalton. "My poor child!" she said, as if to herself. Then she looked at Marion with something like a flash in her usually gentle eyes. "And do you hold yourself guiltless in this matter?" she asked. "If Paul Rathborne is a traitor to Helen — as he surely is, — have not you encouraged his admiration? Does not

your conscience tell you that you have sacrificed her happiness for the gratification of your vanity?"

"No," replied Marion; "my conscience tells me nothing of the kind. How could I prevent Mr. Rathborne's folly? But, of course, I expected to be blamed for it," she added, bitterly. "That is the justice of the world."

"God forgive me if I am unjust!" said Mrs. Dalton. "I did not mean to be. But, Marion, this is not altogether a surprise to me. I have seen his admiration for you, and I have seen — I could not help seeing — that you did not discourage it."

"Why should I have discouraged it?" asked Marion. "I saw no harm in it. I could not imagine that because he found some things to like — to admire, if you will — in me, he would become a traitor to Helen. It is asking too much to demand that one turn one's back on a man because he is a shade more than civil."

Mrs. Dalton shook her head. "Those are merely words," she said. "They do not deceive yourself any more than they deceive me. You know that you have used this man's admiration as fuel for your vanity, and that so cautious and so selfish a man would never have acted as he has done if he had not felt himself encouraged. Do not misunderstand me," she added, more hastily. "For Helen's sake I am not sorry that this has happened. It is better for her, even at the cost of great present suffering, that her eyes should be opened to his true character. But you, Marion — how can you forgive yourself for the part you have played? And what is to become of you if you do not check the vanity which has led you to betray the trust and wring the heart of your best friend?"

The quiet, penetrating words — gentle although so grave — seemed to Marion at that moment like a sentence from which there was no appeal. Her conscience echoed it, her eyes fell, for an instant it looked as if she had nothing to reply. But she rallied quickly.

“ I am sorry if you think I have wilfully done anything to pain Helen,” she said, coldly. “ It does not strike me that I could have averted this, unless I had been gifted with a foreknowledge which I do not possess. I could never have imagined that Mr. Rathborne would be so false with regard to Helen, and so presumptuous with regard to *me*.”

The haughtiness of the last words was not lost on the ear of the listener, who looked at the beautiful, scornful face with a mingling of pity and indignation

“ You expected,” she said, “ to encourage a man’s admiration up to a certain point, and yet to restrain his presumption? A little more knowledge of human nature would have told you that was impossible; a little more feeling would have kept you from desiring it.” She paused a moment, then went on, with the same restrained gravity: “ I am sorry if I seem to you harsh, but nothing in this affair is worse to me than the revelation it makes of your character. I am grieved by Helen’s suffering, and shocked by Paul Rathborne’s treachery; but for the first I have the comfort that it may in the end spare her worse suffering, and for the second I feel that it is not a surprise — that I never wholly trusted his sincerity. But *you*, Marion — what can I think of you, who, without any stronger feeling than vanity to lead you on, have trifled with your own sense of honor, as well as with the deep-

est feelings of others? What will your future be if you do not change — if you do not try to think less of unworthy objects and more of worthy ones — less of gaining admiration and more of keeping your conscience clear and your heart clean?"

"What will my future be!" repeated Marion. She rose as she spoke, and answered, proudly: "That concerns myself alone. I have no fear of it; I feel that I can make it what I will, and I shall certainly not will to make it anything unworthy. But it need not trouble you in the least. I am sorry that my coming here should have brought any trouble on Helen. The only amend I can make is to go away at once, and that I will do."

"No," said Mrs. Dalton, quickly; "that can not mend matters now, and would only throw a very serious reflection upon you when it is known that Helen's engagement is at an end. I cannot consent to it."

"But Helen's engagement might not be at an end if I went away," responded Marion.

"You do not know Helen yet," said Mrs. Dalton, quietly. "I have not spoken to her on the subject, but I am certain what her decision will be."

Marion herself was by no means certain that Mrs. Dalton's judgment was correct. She thought Helen weak and yielding to the last degree, and believed that very little entreaty would be requisite on Rathborne's part to induce her to forgive him. "It will be only necessary for him to throw all the blame on me," she thought, with a bitter smile, as she went to her chamber. Nevertheless, it was not a very tranquil night that she passed. Whatever change the future

might bring, she knew that Helen was suffering now — suffering the keen pangs which a loving, trusting heart feels when its love and trust have been betrayed. “It is hard on her, she is so good, so kind, so incapable herself of betraying any one!” thought the girl, whose conscience was still in a very dormant state, but whose sense of pity was touched. “How sorry Claire would be if she knew!” And then came the reflection, “What would Claire think of me?” followed by the quick reply, “She would be as unjust as the rest, and call it my fault, no doubt.”

The thought of Claire’s judgment, however, was another sting added to those which already disturbed her; and it was not strange that she tossed on her pillow during the better part of the night, only falling asleep toward morning. As is usually the case after a wakeful night, her sleep was heavy, so that the first sound that roused her was the breakfast bell. She opened her eyes with a start, and to her surprise saw Helen standing beside her.

The memory of all that had happened flashed like lightning into her mind; and, unable to reconcile that memory with this appearance, she could only gasp, “Helen! — what are you doing here?”

“I knocked at the door, but you did not answer, so I came in,” Helen responded, simply. “It is late, else I should not have disturbed you. But I wanted to speak to you before you went down.”

“Yes,” said Marion. She sat up in bed, with white draperies all about her, and looked at her cousin. She expected a demand for explanation, perhaps reproaches, but she did not expect what came.

“I only want to tell you,” said Helen, with the

same quiet simplicity, "that I have no reason to blame you for — what occurred yesterday. It was not your fault: you could not have helped it. I don't know that any one is to blame very much," she added, with a sigh; "but I felt that I ought to tell you that I do not blame *you* at all."

"Helen!" cried Marion. All her proud self-control suddenly gave way, and she burst into tears. The generosity which underlay the erring surface of her nature was touched to the quick, and her conscience spoke as it had never spoken before. "Helen, you are too good," she said. "You judge me too kindly. I do not feel myself that I am not to blame. On the contrary, I have no doubt my aunt is perfectly right, and that I am very much to blame. I let my vanity and my love of admiration carry me too far, but never with the intention of injuring you or betraying your trust — never!"

"I am sure of that," said Helen, gently. She laid her hand on the bent head of the other. It startled her to see Marion display such feeling and such humility as this. "Mamma was thinking of me," she went on; "else she would not have blamed you; for how could you help being more attractive than I am? If I was unreasonable enough to think for a little time last night that you were to blame, I know better now. God has given me strength to look at things more calmly. I can even see that *he* may not be greatly in fault. No doubt he thought he loved me — until he saw you."

"Helen, he is not worthy of you!" cried Marion, passionately. "He loves no one but himself."

Helen shook her head. "Surely he loves you,"

she said; "else why should he tell you so? But we need not discuss this. Will you come down when you are ready?"

"Oh! yes," said Marion, with an effort; "I will be down very soon."

She rose as Helen left the room, and dressed very hastily, a prey the while to many conflicting emotions. Relief was mingled with self-reproach, and admiration of Helen's generosity with scorn of her weakness. "For, of course, her excuses for him mean that she will forgive him!" she thought. "I have heard that women — most women — are foo's in just that way, and Helen is exactly the kind of woman to be guilty of that folly. The miserable dastard!" — she remembered his threat to herself — "I wish I could punish him as he deserves for his treachery and presumption!"

It did not occur to her to ask whether or not *she* deserved any punishment for the share she confessed to having borne in the treachery. Had the idea been suggested to her, she would have said that her share was infinitesimal compared with his, and that she had already been punished by the insolence she had drawn upon herself.

CHAPTER XII.

BUT Helen's quietness did not deceive her mother, whose heart ached as she saw in the pale young face all the woful change wrought by one night of suffering, one sharp touch of anguish. Yet, if she had only known it, the girl brought back into the house a very different face from that which she had taken out in the early morning, when, driven by an intolerable sense of pain, she had gone in search of strength to bear it. There was but one place where such strength was to be found, and thither her feet had carried her direct. She was the first person to enter the little church when it was opened to the freshness of the summer morning; and long after the Holy Sacrifice was over she had still knelt, absorbed and motionless, before the altar. Everyone went away: she was left alone with the Presence in the tabernacle; and in the stillness, the absolute quiet, a Voice seemed speaking to her aching heart, and bringing comfort to her troubled soul. When at length, warned of the passage of time by the striking of a distant clock, she lifted her face from her clasped hands, even amid the stains of tears there were signs of peace. The sting of bitterness had been taken out of her grief; and, that being so, it

had become endurable. She might and would suffer still; but when she had once brought herself to resign this suffering into the hands of God, and with the docility of a child accept what it pleased Him to permit, the worst was over.

The first result of the struggle she had made and the victory she had gained was apparent when, on her return home, she went to Marion's room. The generous heart could not rest without clearing itself at once of the least shadow of injustice, — and she had implied, if she had not expressed, a blame of Marion which she was noble enough to feel might be unjust. Hence that visit which so deeply touched the girl, whose own conscience failed to echo Helen's acquittal.

Breakfast passed very quietly. Mrs. Dalton saw that her daughter was making an heroic effort to appear as usual, and she seconded it as far as lay in her power, talking more than was her custom in order to allow Helen to be silent, and to prevent the boys from asking questions about events of the preceding afternoon. To make no change in her manner to Marion was more difficult; but, with the example that Helen set, she was able to accomplish even this; and finally the usual separation for the morning took place with great sense of relief to all concerned. Marion put on her hat and went out, ostensibly to keep an appointment with Mrs. Singleton, but really to be safely out of the way in case Rathborne should make his appearance.

Helen herself had some fear of this appearance, and she took refuge in her own chamber, dreading the necessary explanation to her mother, not so much on her own account as on account of the judgment upon

Rathborne which she knew would follow. Tenderness does not die in an hour or a day; and although her resolve to put him out of her life was firm, she was not yet able to put him out of her heart, nor to think without shrinking of the severe condemnation which her mother would mete out to him. There was no need for haste in speaking; she might rest a little, and gather strength for the trial, knowing that Mrs. Dalton would make no effort to force her confidence.

So she was resting on the bed, where she had not slept at all the night before, when the door softly opened and Mrs. Dalton entered the room.

“Helen,” she said, gently, “I am sorry to disturb you, but Paul Rathborne is downstairs and asks to see you. What shall I tell him?”

“Tell him that I cannot see him,” answered Helen. “It is impossible! You must speak for me — you must make him understand that he is entirely free from any engagement to me, and I do not blame him for what he could not help. I suppose you have guessed that something is the matter,” she added, wistfully. “It is only that I have found out he cares for Marion — not for me.”

Mrs. Dalton put her arm around her with a touch full of sympathy, without speaking for a moment. Then she said: “My child, I always knew he was not worthy of you.”

“But this does not prove him unworthy of me,” replied Helen, in a tone sharp with pain. “It only proves that he was mistaken when he thought of me.”

“Men of honor do not make such mistakes,” said Mrs. Dalton.

“How could he help falling in love with Marion?” continued Helen. “She is so much more beautiful, so much more attractive than I am! And that he has done so, settles the doubt of his disinterestedness which you always entertained. Do him so much justice, mamma. You feared that he professed to care for me because I have a little money. But Mariou has none.”

“We need not discuss that, my dear,” said Mrs. Dalton, who was touched but not convinced by this generous plea. “It is enough if, satisfied that his affections have wandered, you are determined to dismiss him.”

“Yes,” said Helen, “I am determined on that. But I cannot see him. You must go to him, and tell him from me that I do not blame him, but that all is at an end between us.”

With this message Mrs. Dalton went downstairs. Her own mood with Rathborne was far from being as charitable as her daughter's; and her face, usually set in very gentle lines, hardened to sternness as she descended. She was not inclined to deal leniently with one who had so shamefully betrayed the trust placed in him, and had overshadowed so darkly the sunshine of Helen's life. Like some other parents, she had up to this time imagined that the stern conditions of human existence were to be relaxed for Helen, and that one so formed for happiness was to be granted that happiness in a measure which is allowed to few. A sense of keen injury was, therefore, added to her indignation at a treachery for which she could find no palliation.

Rathborne, who was anxiously expecting yet dread-

ing to see Helen, drew his breath with a sharp sense of vexation when his aunt entered. This was worse than he had feared. Calculating upon Helen's gentleness, he had not thought that she would refuse to see him; and if she saw him, he believed that his influence would be strong enough to induce her to overlook anything. But when Mrs. Dalton entered, he knew that the consequences of his treachery were to be fully paid. A cold greeting was exchanged between them, and then a short silence followed, as each hesitated to speak. It was Mrs. Dalton who broke it, as soon as she felt able to control her voice.

"I have told Helen that you are here," she said, "but she declines to see you. It is not necessary, I presume, to explain why she declines. Of that you are fully aware. It is not necessary, either, that I should add anything to her own words, which are, briefly, that you will consider everything at an end between you. She added also that she does not blame you for anything that has occurred—but I hardly think that your own conscience will echo that."

"No," said Rathborne, who had paled perceptibly, "my own conscience does not echo it. On the contrary, I feel that I am deeply to blame; yet I hoped that Helen might believe me when I say that I am not so much to blame as appears on the surface. A man may be tempted beyond his strength, and some women are experts in such temptations."

Mrs. Dalton looked at him with scorn in her eyes. "If you think," she said, "that you will serve your cause with Helen by such cowardly insinuations as that, you are mistaken. And, as far as I am concerned, you have only taken a step lower in my

esteem. But that is a point which does not matter. Wherever the blame rests, the fact remains that if Helen did not take the decision of the matter into her hands, *I* should do so. You have proved yourself a man whom it is impossible I can ever consent to trust with my daughter's life and happiness."

Rathborne rose to his feet. The decisive words seemed to leave him no alternative. He felt that he had committed a blunder which was altogether irretrievable; and combined with the keen mortification of failure was a hatred, which gathered bitterness with every moment, against the woman he believed to have led him on and deceived him.

"In that case," he said, "there is nothing for me to do but to go. I had hoped that Helen might understand — that she would not let a moment of folly outweigh the devotion of years; but if she judges me as hardly as you seem to imply, I see that my hope is vain. Tell her from me that if she knew the whole truth she would regard the matter in a different light. But if she does not wish to know the truth — if she prefers to judge me unheard,— I can only submit."

"It is best she should not see you," said Mrs. Dalton, who was glad that Helen herself had decided this point. "Even if you persuaded her to trust you again, I could not give my consent to the renewal of an engagement which has been ended in this manner."

"*You* have always distrusted me," said Rathborne, bitterly.

"No," she replied, gravely; "so far from that, I trusted you as my own son, though I did not think you were the person to make Helen happy. I had

always a fear that you did not care for her enough, and now I am forced to believe that you did not care for her at all. If you had done so, this could never have happened, just as it could never have happened if you had possessed the right principle and the sense of honor which I should certainly wish my daughter's husband to possess."

Rathborne could hardly believe the evidence of his ears as he listened to these severe, incisive words. He had always regarded Mrs. Dalton as a person who was mild to weakness, and whom, whenever it suited him, he could influence in whatever manner desired. He therefore scarcely recognized this woman, with her sentence of condemnation based on premises which he could not deny, though he made a faint attempt to do so.

"You do not understand," he said, "how a brief infatuation — a delirium of fancy — can attack a man. let his sense of honor be what it may. As for my attachment to Helen, that is something which has lasted too long to be doubted now."

"Will you inform me, then, how you proposed to reconcile it with your declaration to Marion?"

"That was drawn from me — forced from me!" he exclaimed. "It was a madness of the moment, into which I was led by her art."

Mrs. Dalton rose now, a bright spot of color on each cheek. "That is enough!" she said. "I can listen to nothing more. No man of honor would, for his own sake, utter such words as those — even if they were true, and I am sure they are not. Great as my niece's faults may be, she is incapable of such conduct as you charge her with. Go, Paul Rathborne! By

such excuses you only prove more and more how unworthy you are of Helen's affection or Helen's trust."

"Very well," he answered, his face white and bitter with anger. "As you and she have decided, so be it. But take care that the day does not come when you will deeply regret this decision."

Then he turned, and, without giving her time to reply had she been so inclined, left the room.

Mrs. Dalton looked after him with a heavy sigh. Regret her decision she knew that she would not; but it would be vain to say that she did not regret the necessity for it, that she did not think with a keen pang of Helen's suffering, and that she did not feel, with much bitterness, that Marion had not been guiltless in the matter. Yet even in the midst of her indignation she had pity for the girl, whose vanity and ambition were likely to wreck her life, as they had already gone far to alienate her best friends.

Meanwhile Marion could not disguise the fact that she was not in her usual spirits — for the thought of Helen weighed heavily upon her,— and Mrs. Singleton, observing this, drew at once her own conclusions.

"I am afraid the gypsy tea was not altogether a success, so far as you were concerned or your cousin either," she said. "I heard that she went home with Frank Morley instead of with her *fiancé*. I will not ask any indiscreet questions, but I suspect that your attractions have drawn Mr. Rathborne from his allegiance. It is what I have anticipated for some time."

Marion frowned a little, annoyed by this freedom,

which, however, she felt that she had drawn upon herself, and had no right to resent. But she evaded the implied question.

"Helen was not feeling well, and so she made her cousin take her home before we were ready to start," she said. "I am not particularly partial to Miss Morley's society, or Mr. Rathborne's either, and thought I would accept the seat you offered me. That was the whole matter."

"I am delighted to hear it," said Mrs. Singleton, not deceived in the least. "I was afraid there had been a lover's quarrel, and that perhaps you were the innocent cause of it. That is always such an awkward position. I have occupied it myself once or twice, so I speak from knowledge."

"I am sure that if you occupied it, it must have been innocently," said Marion, with malice. "But we need not discuss what is not, I trust, likely to occur, so far as I am concerned. How is Mr. Singleton this morning?"

"Not well at all. This is one of his bad days. And it is one of mine, too," she added, with a slight grimace; "for I have just heard that Brian Earle is coming."

"And who is Brian Earle?"

"Surely you have heard my uncle talk of him? At least, it is most astonishing if you have not; for he likes him better than any one else in the world, I think; although they don't agree very well. I have no fancy for Brian myself: I find him entirely too much of a prig; but I will say that he might twist the old man around his finger if he would only yield a little more to his wishes and opinions. It is a lucky

thing for us that he will not, but it does not make *his* folly less. Fancy! Mr. Singleton asked him to live with him, look after his business, and generally devote himself to him during his life, with the promise of making him his sole heir, and *he refused!* Can you believe that?"

"I must believe it if you are sure of it," replied Marion, smiling at the energy of the other. "But why did he refuse?"

Mrs. Singleton shrugged her shoulders. "Because he was not willing to give up control of his own life, and spend the best years of his youth in idleness, waiting for an old man to die. That is what he said. As if he would not gain by that waiting more than his wretched art would bring him if he toiled at it all his life!"

"His art — what is he?"

"Oh! a painter — or an attempt at one. Are such people always visionary and impracticable? I judge so from what I have read of them, and from my knowledge of him. It is true that his folly serves our interest very well; for if he had agreed to what his uncle proposed, we should have no chance of inheriting anything; but, nevertheless, one has a contempt for a man with so little sense."

"I think you should have the highest regard for him in this instance, since he is serving your interest so well. But why is he coming?"

"To see his uncle before going abroad again. Mr. Singleton has a strong attachment for him, notwithstanding the way he has acted; and I should not be surprised if he made him his heir, after all. So you see there is no reason why I should be overjoyed at

his visit, especially since he is not at all an agreeable person, as you will see."

"I may not see," said Marion; "for I do not think I shall be in Scarborough much longer."

"You are going away?" said Mrs. Singleton, with a quick flash of comprehension in her eyes.

"In a few days probably," was the reply. "I promised to spend only a month with Helen, and I have been here now six weeks."

"But I thought you were good for the season," said Mrs. Singleton; while her inward comment was: "So matters are just as I thought!"

CHAPTER XIII.

RETICENCE was not Mrs. Singleton's distinguishing characteristic. It was not very long, therefore, before she mentioned her suspicions about Marion both to her husband and her uncle. The first laughed, and remarked that it was only what he had expected; the latter looked grave, and said: "In that case it will not be pleasant for her to remain in her aunt's house."

"So far from it," was the careless reply, "that she is speaking of leaving Scarborough."

Mr. Singleton glanced up sharply. "That would be very undesirable," he said. "Her singing is a great pleasure to me; for the matter of that, so is her society. Ask her to come and stay with you."

Mrs. Singleton lifted her eyebrows. This was far from what she anticipated or desired. There had been a little malicious pleasure in her announcement, but she would certainly have refrained from making it had she feared such a result as this. She was so vexed that for a moment she could scarcely speak. Then she said: "You are very kind; but, although I like Miss Lynde, I do not care enough for her society to ask her to stay with me."

"I never imagined for an instant that you cared for her society," replied Mr. Singleton, coolly. "I was

not thinking of your gratification, but of my own, in desiring you to ask her here. Of course, it is necessary that she should be nominally your guest; although, as we are aware, really mine."

"I think, then, that it would be best she should be nominally as well as really yours," said Mrs. Singleton, too much provoked to consider for the moment what was her best policy.

Mr. Singleton looked at her with an ominous flash in his glance. "Very well," he answered, deliberately. "That is just as you please. We can easily change existing arrangements. I will speak to Tom about it."

But this intimation at once brought Mrs. Singleton to unconditional surrender.

"There is no need for that," she said, hastily. "Of course I will do whatever you desire. I only thought it might be best that the matter should be clearly understood. I have no fancy for Miss Lynde, nor any desire for her companionship. To speak the truth, I do not trust her at all."

Mr. Singleton shrugged his shoulders — a gesture to which he gave an expression that many of his friends found very irritating. It said plainly at present that nothing mattered less in his opinion than whether Mrs. Singleton trusted Miss Lynde or not.

"Let us keep to the point," he said, quietly. "What your sentiments with regard to the young lady may be I do not inquire. I only desire you to ask her to come here. If you object to do this — and far be it from me to place any constraint upon you, — I must simply make an arrangement by which it can be done. That is all."

“Why should I object?” asked Mrs. Singleton. “If she comes as your guest, it is certainly not my affair.”

“I have requested, however, that you ask her to come as your guest. Do not misunderstand that point. And do not give the invitation so that it may be declined. I should consider that tantamount to not giving it at all. See that she comes. You can arrange it if you like.”

With this intimation the conversation ended, and Mrs. Singleton had no comfort but to tell her husband of the disagreeable necessity laid upon her. “I am to ask Marion Lynde to come here as my guest, and I am to see that she comes! Could anything be more vexatious?” she demanded. “I am so provoked that I feel inclined to leave your uncle to manage his own affairs, and to get somebody else to invite guests for his amusement.”

“Nothing would be easier than for him to do so,” said Mr. Singleton. “We are not at all necessary to him, you know. And why on earth should you object to asking Miss Lynde, if he desires it? It seems to me that you might desire it yourself.”

“Oh! it seems so to you, does it?” asked the lady, sarcastically. “Because she has a pretty face, I presume. It does not occur to you that a girl who has drawn her cousin’s *fiancé* into a love affair with her—for I am certain that is what has occurred—would betray us just as quickly, and use her influence with this infatuated old man to any end that suited her.”

Mr. Singleton looked a little grave at this view of the case. “Well,” he said, “that may be so, but

how are we to help it? Certainly not by showing that we are afraid of her."

"I might have helped it by letting her go away without telling him anything about it," said the lady. "And I wish I had!"

"Useless!" said her philosophical husband. "He would have found it out for himself. Don't worry over the matter. Ask her here with a good grace, since you have no alternative, and trust that he will tire of her as he has tired of everybody else."

That this was good advice — in fact, the only advice to be followed — Mrs. Singleton was well aware. And she proceeded to do what was required of her, with as good a grace as she could command. The invitation surprised Marion, but it was not unwelcome, as cutting the knot of her difficulties. For, anxious as she now was to leave her aunt's house, and to spare herself the silent, unconscious reproach of Helen's pale face, she was deeply averse to returning to her uncle's home. She had registered a passionate resolve never to return there if she could avoid it; but she had begun to fear that she would be unable to avoid doing so, when Mrs. Singleton's invitation offered her, at least, a temporary mode of escape. She received it graciously, saying that she would be happy to accept it whenever her aunt and cousin would consent to let her go.

"Oh! I am sure they will be averse to giving you up," said Mrs. Singleton, with the finest sarcastic intention. "But if you are intending to leave them in any event, they can not object to your coming to me for a time."

"They will certainly not object to that," replied

Marion. "The question is only *when* I can avail myself of your kind invitation."

This proved to be quite soon; for when Mrs. Dalton heard of the invitation, she advised Marion to set an early day for accepting it. "I think it necessary," she said, "to take Helen away for change of air and scene. I should have asked you to accompany us; but, under the circumstances, the arrangement proposed by Mrs. Singleton is best. I am sure you will understand this."

"I understand it perfectly," said Marion; "and am very sorry that you should have been embarrassed by any thought of me."

So it was settled. Helen was quite passive, ready to do whatever was desired of her; but the spring of happiness seemed broken within her — that natural, spontaneous happiness which had appeared as much a part of her as its perfume is part of a flower. It was hard for Mrs. Dalton to forgive those who, between them, had wrought this change; although she knew that it was well for her daughter to be saved, at any cost, from a marriage with Rathborne.

But Rathborne himself was naturally not of this opinion; and, being a person of strong tenacity of purpose, he was determined not to give up his cause as lost until he had tested his influence over Helen. The opportunity to do this was for some time lacking. He knew that it would be useless to go again to Mrs. Dalton's house and ask for an interview, even if his pride had not rendered such a step impossible. He waited for some chance of meeting Helen alone; but she shrank from going out, so he had found no opportunity, when he heard of her intended departure.

This brought him to see the necessity of vigorous measures, and consequently he appeared the next morning at the Catholic church, having learned at what hour Mass was said.

Entering late — for he did not wish to be observed more than was unavoidable,— he found the Mass in progress, and about half a dozen persons representing the congregation. His glance swept rapidly over these, and at once identified Helen, observing with a sense of relief that she was alone. Satisfied on this point, he dropped into a seat near the door to wait until the service ended, looking on meanwhile with a careless attention which had not the least element of comprehension. To him it was an absurd and unintelligible rite, which he did not even make the faintest effort to understand.

When it ended, he thought that his waiting would also end; but to his irritated surprise he found that Helen's devotions were by no means over. The other members of the congregation left the church, each bestowing a curious glance on him in passing; but Helen knelt on, until he began to suspect that she must be aware of his presence and was endeavoring to avoid him. The thought inspired him with fresh energy and obstinacy. "She shall not escape me. I will stay here until noon, if necessary," he said to himself; while Helen, entirely unconscious of who was behind, was sending up her simple petitions for submission and patience and strength. They did not really last very long; and when she rose, Rathborne rose also and stepped into the vestibule to await her.

His patience had no further trial of delay there. Within less than a minute the door leading into the

church opened and Helen's face appeared. At the first instant of appearing, it had all the serenity that comes from prayer; but when she saw him standing before her, this expression changed quickly to one of distress. With something like a gasp she said; "Paul!" pausing with the door in her hand.

Rathborne stepped forward, with his own hand extended. "Forgive me for startling you," he said; "but this was my only chance to see you, and I felt that I must do so."

"Why?" asked Helen. She closed the door, but did not give her hand. "There is no reason, that I am aware of, why you should wish to see me," she added, in a voice which trembled a little. "Everything has been said that need be said between us."

"On your side, perhaps so," he answered; "but not on mine. I have said nothing. You have given me no opportunity to say anything. You have condemned me unheard."

"Condemned you! No," she replied. "I have never had any intention or desire to condemn you. On the contrary, I said from the first that I did not blame you for what was probably beyond your power to control. But I desired that all might be ended between us; and, that being so, there is nothing more to say on a subject that is — that must be — painful to you as well as to me."

"It will not be painful if I can induce you to listen to me and to believe me," he said. "That is what I have come this morning to beg of you — the opportunity to set myself right. Appoint a time when I can come and find you alone, or meet me where you will. Only give me the opportunity to justify myself to you."

He spoke with an earnest pleading which was by no means simulated, for he never lost the consciousness of how much for him depended upon this; and that the pleading had an effect upon Helen was evident in her growing pallor, in the look of pain that darkened her eyes. But she answered, with a firmness on which he had not reckoned:—

“You should not ask of me something which could not serve any good end. No explanation can alter facts, and I would rather not discuss them. What happened was very natural. No one knows that better than I. But nothing can efface it now.”

“Not if you heard that I was led into folly by every possible art?” he demanded, carried beyond self-control by the unforeseen difficulty of bending one who had always before seemed so pliant to his influence. “Not if I proved to you that your cousin —”

Helen lifted her hand with a gesture which had in it something of a command. “Not another word like that,” she said. “I will not listen to it. If what you imply were true, how would it help matters? A man who is weak enough to be led away by the art of another is as little to be trusted as the man who deliberately breaks his faith. He may not be as blamable — I do not say that,— but one could never repose confidence in him again. That is over.”

“Helen!” said Rathborne. He was amazed, almost confounded, by a dignity of manner and tone which he had not only never seen in Helen before, but of which he would not have believed her capable. He did not reckon on the judgment and strength which earnest prayer had brought, nor did it occur to him that the worst place he could have chosen for the

exertion of his influence was the threshold of the church, where day after day she had come to beg for the direction that in such a crisis would surely not be denied her. "I hardly know you," he went on, in the tone of one deeply wounded. "How changed you are!—how cold! What has become of the sweet and gentle Helen I have known and loved?"

She looked at him with the first reproach that had been in either tone or glance. "The Helen you knew—who trusted you so absolutely and loved you so well—is dead," she answered. "There is no need that we should speak of her." She paused for an instant, and then, with her voice breaking a little, went on: "I am going away—I may not see you again in a long time. Meanwhile I will try, with the help of God, to forget the past, and I beg you to do the same; for it can never be renewed. And if you wish to spare me pain, you will never speak of it again."

Had Rathborne uttered what was in his mind, he would have replied that whether he gave her pain or not was a matter of the utmost indifference to him, if only he might gain his desired end. A sense of powerless exasperation possessed him, the greater for his disappointment. He had been so certain of bending Helen to his will whenever he met her alone; yet now Helen stood before him like a rock, with immovable resolution on her gentle face. He lost control of himself, and, stepping forward, seized her by the hand.

"You are not speaking your own mind in this," he said. "You are influenced by others, and I will not submit to it. The dictation of your mother or your priest shall not come between us."

“Nothing has come between us except your own conduct and my own sense of right,” answered Helen. She grew paler still, but did not falter. “It is best that we should part at once; for you have made me feel more strongly that it is best we should part altogether. Let me go. You forget where we are.”

“You will not listen to me?— you will not give me an opportunity to explain?”

“There is nothing to explain,” she said, faintly; for the strain of the interview was telling upon her. “Nothing can alter the fact of what I heard. I could never trust you or believe in your affection after that. Once for all, *everything is at an end between us*. Now let me go.”

He released her with a violence which sent her back a step. “Go, then!” he said. “I always knew that you were weak, but I never knew before how weak. You are a puppet in the hands of others, and both you and they shall regret this.”

He left the vestibule; while she, after waiting for a moment to recover herself, turned and re-entered the church.

CHAPTER XIV.

AND so, Brian, I find you as obstinate as ever!" said Mr. Singleton, in a complaining tone.

The person whom he addressed smiled a little. He did not look very obstinate, this pleasant-faced young man, with clear gray eyes, that regarded the elder man kindly and humorously. They were sitting in the latter's private room, which opened into the drawing-room — Mr. Singleton leaning back in his deep, luxurious chair; Brian Earle seated opposite him, but nearer the open window, through which his glance wandered now and then, attracted by the soft summer scene outside, flooded with the sunshine of late afternoon.

"I am sorry if it seems to you only a question of obstinacy," he said, in a voice as pleasant as his face; "for that is the last thing I should wish to be guilty of. Mere obstinacy — that is, attachment to one's will simply because it is one's will — always seemed to me a very puerile thing. My impulse is to do what another wishes rather than what I wish myself — all things being equal."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Singleton, with the sarcastic inflection of voice which was very common with him. "Then I am to suppose that, where I am concerned,

your impulse is exactly contrary to what it is in the case of others; for certainly you have never consented to do anything that I wish."

"My dear uncle, is that quite just, because I can not do *one* thing that you wish?"

"That one thing includes everything. You know it as well as I do. In refusing that, you refuse all that I can or ever shall ask of you."

"I am sorry to hear it," said the other. "But do you not think that it is a great thing to ask of a man to resign his own plan and mode of life, to do violence to his inclination, and to give up not only his ambition but his independence as well?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Singleton, "it *is* a great deal; but I offer a great deal also. You should not forget that."

"I do not forget it. You offer an immense price, but it is the price of my freedom and my self-respect"

"In that case we will say no more about it," returned Mr. Singleton, hotly. "If you consider that you would lose your freedom and your self-respect by complying with my wishes — wishes which, I am sure, are very moderate in their demands,—I shall certainly not urge you to do so. We will consider the subject finally closed."

"With all my heart," said Earle. "It is a very painful subject to me, because I regret deeply that I am unable to comply with your wishes."

Mr. Singleton made a wave of his hand which seemed peremptorily to dismiss this regret. "Nothing would be easier than for you to gratify me in the matter if you cared to do so. Since you do not desire

to do so, I shall cease to urge it. I have some self-respect, too ”

To this statement Earle wisely made no reply, and he was also successful in repressing a smile; though he knew well from past experience that his uncle's resolution would not hold for a week, and that the whole ground would have to be exhaustively gone over again — probably again and again.

“ You seem very pleasantly settled here,” he observed after a moment, by way of opening a new subject. “ This is a charming old place.”

“ Yes. I should buy it if I expected to live long enough to make it worth while,” replied Mr. Singleton. “ The climate here suits me exceedingly well.”

“ And the people are agreeable, I suppose? ” observed Earle, absently, his eye fastened on the lovely alterations of light and shade — of the nearer green melting into distant blue — which made up the scene without.

“ I know little or nothing of the people of the town,” said Mr. Singleton; “ but I meet a sufficient number of my old friends — brought here, like myself, by the climate — to give me as much society as I want. Tom and his wife have, of course, a large circle of acquaintances; so you need entertain no fear of dullness in the short time you are good enough to give me.”

“ Do you fancy that I am afraid of dullness? ” asked Earle, with a laugh. “ On the contrary, no man was ever less inclined for society than I am. But I like the look of the country about here, and I think I shall do sketching.”

“ If you find sketching to do, there may be perhaps

some hope of detaining you for a little while," said Mr. Singleton.

"The length of my stay will not be in the least dependent on any possible or probable sketching," returned Earle, good-humoredly. He understood the disappointment which prompted Mr. Singleton to make these sarcastic speeches; and they did not irritate him in the least, but only inspired him with fresh regret that he could not do what was desired of him. For he spoke truly in saying that, all things being equal, he much preferred to do what another wished rather than what he wished himself. This was part of a disposition which was amiable and obliging almost to a fault. But with the amiability went great strength of resolution, when he was once fairly roused; and this resolution had been roused on a matter that he felt was a question of the independence of his life. To do what his uncle asked would be to resign that independence for an indefinite length of time — to give up the career on which from earliest boyhood he had set his heart — to sell his liberty for a mess of worldly pottage — that had no attraction for him.

A man who cares little for money beyond the amount necessary for moderate competence, and who has no desire for wealth, is a character so rare in this age and country that people are somewhat justified in the incredulity with which they usually regard him. But now and then such characters exist, and Brian Earle was one of them. Possessing simple, almost austere tastes, having from his earliest boyhood a passion for art, money had never appeared to him the supreme good which it is considered to be by so many others; nor, in any real sense of the word, a good at all. This

was partly owing to the fact that he had inherited fortune sufficient for all reasonable needs, and had no one depending upon him. A man who has given hostages to fortune cannot be as indifferent to fortune as one who has given none. Even if he lacks a mercenary spirit, he must desire for those whose happiness rests in his care the freedom from sordid anxieties which a monetary competency in sufficient degree alone can give.

But Brian Earle, having no nearer relative than a married sister, had nothing to teach him to value wealth in this manner; and, since it could purchase nothing for which he cared, he felt no temptation to accept Mr. Singleton's proposition that he should devote his life exclusively to him, on consideration of inheriting his whole estate. There were few people who would have hesitated over such an offer, and who would not have been inclined to hold the man insane who did hesitate. But Brian Earle did more than hesitate: he absolutely refused it.

It said much for the influence of his personal character that, even after this refusal, Mr. Singleton still evinced the partiality for his society which he had always exhibited, still claimed as much of that society as he possibly could, and generally consulted him when he had a decision of importance to make. "Ten to one, Earle will finally get the fortune as well as his own way," those who knew most of the matter often remarked. But one person, at least, had no expectation of this, and that was Earle himself.

His affection for his uncle and gratitude for much kindness, however, made him show a deference and regard for the latter which had no basis in interested

hopes, and which Mr. Singleton was not dull enough to mistake. Indeed there could be no doubt that his own regard for Earle was largely based upon the fact that the young man desired nothing from him, and was altogether independent of him, even while this independence vexed and irked him. Perceiving at the present time that the conversation had reached a point where it would be well that it should cease, Brian rose to his feet.

“I think I will stroll about a little, and look into those possibilities of sketching,” he said. “I have scarcely glanced at the place as yet.”

“Probably some one is going to drive,” observed Mr. Singleton. “There are plenty of horses, and Tom and his wife keep them well employed. Of course they are at your service also.”

“I am accustomed to a humbler mode of locomotion, and really prefer it,” Brian answered. “One sees more on foot.”

“I wish you had more expensive tastes,” said his uncle. “One could get a hold on you then.”

He seemed to be speaking a thought aloud; but, as Earle had no desire to be provoking, he did not utter in reply the quick assent, “Yes, by no surer means than expensive tastes can a man sell himself into bondage.”

He went out, whistling softly, seized his hat in the hall, and was crossing toward the entrance, when down the broad, curving staircase came Mrs. Singleton in out-door costume. Probably the encounter was no more to her taste than to his, but she successfully simulated pleasure, which was more than he was able to do.

“You are just going out, Brian?” she said. “That is fortunate, for I wanted to ask you to go to drive with us; but I knew you were with your uncle, and he is so fond of your society that I did not like to disturb you. But now you will come, of course. Only Miss Lynde and myself are going. I believe you have not yet met Miss Lynde — ah, here she is!”

For, as they came out on the portico together, they found Marion already there. Words of polite refusal were on Earle's lips — for had he not just remarked that he did not care to drive? — but when his glance fell on the beautiful girl, to whom Mrs. Singleton at once presented him, those words found no expression. It was natural enough that, with the delight of the artist in beauty, he should have felt that the presence of such a face put the question of driving in a new aspect altogether. It would be a pleasure to study that face, and a pleasure to discover if the mind and the spirit behind were worthy of such a shrine.

So, after handing the ladies into the open carriage that awaited them, he followed, and took his seat opposite the face that attracted him, as it had attracted the admiration of everyone who ever looked at it. Marion herself was so accustomed to this admiration that the perception of it in Earle's eyes neither surprised nor elated her. She took it as a matter of course, — a matter which might or might not prove of importance, — and meanwhile regarded rather curiously on her part the man who carelessly put a fortune aside in order to follow his own will and his own chosen path of life. On this remarkable conduct she had already speculated more than once. Did it

mean that he was a fool — as Mrs. Singleton plainly thought, — or did it mean that he had a belief in himself and in his own powers, which made him stronger than other men, and therefore able to dispense with the aid which they so highly desired?

She had not sat opposite him for many minutes before she was able to answer the first question. Decidedly he was not a fool — not even in that modified sense in which people of artistic, imaginative temperaments are sometimes held to be fools by the strictly practical. But with regard to the other question, decision was not so easy. Nothing in his appearance, manner or speech indicated any extraordinary belief in himself; but Marion had sufficient keenness of perception to recognize that, under his unassuming quietness, power of some sort existed. It might be the power to accomplish great things, or it might only be the power to content himself with moderate ones; but it was certainly not an altogether ordinary nature that looked out of the clear gray eyes, and spoke in the pleasant voice.

“Where shall we go?” said Mrs. Singleton to Marion, when they had rolled through Scarborough and were out in the country. “We must show Brian all the points of picturesque interest in the vicinity. Do you think we have time to drive to Elk Ridge?”

“Oh, no!” answered Marion, quickly; “it is too late to go there. And I am sure there are other places nearer at hand which are quite as pretty.”

“Do you think so?” said Mrs. Singleton, skeptically. “Pray tell us about them; for I know of no place half so charming in its surroundings and view as Elk Ridge.”

Marion colored a little. She really did not know of any other place equal to Elk Ridge in picturesque attractions; but her dislike to the idea of revisiting it was so strong that she had spoken instinctively, without thought. She was always quick witted enough to see her way out of a difficulty, however, and after an instant's hesitation she answered:—

“I did not say that I positively knew of such a place, only that I was sure it must exist, and probably near at hand. Why not? The country seems to be very much the same in its features all about here.”

Mrs. Singleton shrugged her shoulders.

“No one can be sure of what may or may not exist,” she said; “but when it is a question of looking for it, I prefer what has been already discovered. We will not go to Elk Ridge, however, if you object. I am afraid our gypsy tea must have left disagreeable associations behind it.”

Earle could not but observe that Marion's color deepened still more, and that a slight tightening of the lines about her mouth showed that her annoyance was greater than the nature of the subject seemed to warrant. “Evidently some very disagreeable association in the matter!” he thought; and, before she could reply to the last remark, he said:—

“Pray do not show me the best thing in the neighborhood at once. That should be led up to by successive degrees. These lovely pastoral meadows and those distant hills strike a note that suits me exactly to-day. I do not care for anything more boldly picturesque.”

“In that case, take the river road, Anderson,” said Mrs. Singleton, addressing the coachman, and

settling herself comfortably under the shade of her lace-covered parasol.

So, for several miles they bowled gently along the level road which followed the margin of a beautiful stream, its soft valley spreading in Arcadian loveliness around them; gentle green hills bounding it; and far away, bathed in luminous mist, a vision of distant, purple mountains.

Earle felt himself lapsed into a state of pleasant content. The luxurious motion of the carriage, the charming scenes passing before his eyes, the beautiful face opposite him, and the sound of musical voices — one, at least, of which did not talk nonsense — all combined to satisfy the artist which was so strong within him, and to make him feel that the virtue which had brought him to Scarborough was rewarded.

As they re-entered the town, in the light of a radiant sunset, an incident occurred which revealed a fact that astonished both Mrs. Singleton and Marion. As they drove rapidly down a street, before them on rising ground stood the Catholic church, with its golden cross in bold relief outlined against the rose-red beauty of the evening sky.

“What a pretty effect!” cried Marion.

Earle turned in his seat to follow the direction of her glance, and, seeing the cross, looked surprised. “What is that?” he said. “It looks like a Catholic church.”

“It is a Catholic church,” answered Marion.

He said nothing more, but as the carriage swept around a corner and carried them in front of it, he looked toward the church and lifted his hat.

This act of reverence would probably have had no

meaning to Mrs. Singleton, but Marion had lived too long with Catholics not to understand it. "Oh!" she exclaimed, involuntarily, with an accent of surprise; adding, when Earle looked at her, "is it possible you are a Catholic!"

He smiled. "Does that astonish you?" he asked. "There are a good many of them in the world."

"A Catholic!" repeated Mrs. Singleton, incredulously. "What nonsense! — Of course he is not — at least not a *Roman* Catholic!"

"Pardon me," he answered, still smiling, "but that is exactly what I am — a Roman Catholic. For that is the only kind of Catholic which it is worth any one's while to be."

CHAPTER XV.

OH, you must be mistaken, Anna!" said Tom Singleton, with his easy good-nature. "Brian could not have told you in earnest that he is a Catholic. The thing is absurd."

"Ask him for yourself, then," answered Mrs. Singleton. "You will soon discover whether or not he is in earnest."

"I can not say that I feel interested in his religious opinions, so why should I ask him?"

"In order to find whether or not I am mistaken, and in order to put your uncle on his guard; for I am sure that he would not be pleased by such a discovery."

"Then let him make it for himself," said Singleton. "It is no affair of mine. I should feel like a sneak if I meddled with such a matter; and, what is more, the old fellow would very quickly let me know that he thought me one. Besides, it makes no difference. Earle is out of the running. His own obstinacy settles that."

"Not so much as you think, perhaps," said the lady. "Why is he here if the matter is settled? Believe it or not, his chance of inheriting the fortune is better than yours to-day."

“Well, if so, let the best man win,” returned Singleton, philosophically. “I shall certainly not descend to any trickery to get the better of him. Of course I am anxious for the fortune, but to show my anxiety would be a very poor way to secure it. I firmly believe that what makes my uncle lean so to Brian is that he does not appear to care for anything that he can do for him.”

“And in my opinion that indifference is all appearance,” observed Mrs. Singleton, sharply. “If he cares nothing for what your uncle can do, why is he in attendance on him? But, however that may be, I shall see that his extraordinary change of religion becomes known.”

“If you go to my uncle with such information, you will only harm yourself,” said Singleton, warningly.

“I shall not think of going to him,” she answered. “I know very well that his sentiments toward me are not sufficiently cordial to make that safe. I shall manage that Brian will give the information himself.”

“If you take my advice, you will let the matter alone,” said her husband.

But he knew very well that she would not take his advice, and he said to himself that it was well for her to do as she liked. She would not be satisfied without doing so; and, after all, if Brian *had* been so foolish as to become a Roman Catholic, there was no objection to his uncle’s knowing it. Earle himself certainly did not desire secrecy, or else he would not have mentioned the fact so openly and carelessly.

And, indeed, nothing was further from Earle’s mind than any desire for secrecy. Therefore, he fell with

the readiest ease into the trap which Mrs. Singleton soon laid for him. It was one evening, when the household party was assembled in the drawing room after dinner, that she led the conversation to foreign politics, and the position of the Papacy in European affairs. Mr. Singleton, who took much more interest than the average American usually does in these affairs, was speedily led to express himself strongly against the Papal claim to temporal sovereignty.

Earle looked up. "I think," he observed, in his pleasant but resolute voice, "that you have, perhaps, never considered that question in its true bearings."

"I have never considered it in its true bearings!" said Mr. Singleton, astonished beyond measure by this bold challenge; for he regarded himself, and was regarded by his friends, as an authority on the subject of European politics. "In that case will you be kind enough to inform me what are its true bearings?"

The request was sarcastic, but Earle answered it with the utmost seriousness. "Certainly," he said, "to the best of my ability." And, before Mr. Singleton could disclaim any desire to be taken in earnest he proceeded to state with great clearness the historical proofs and arguments in favor of the Pope's sovereignty.

His little audience listened with a surprise which yielded, in spite of themselves, to interest. The ideas and facts presented were all new to them, and to one, at least, seemed unanswerable.

It has been already said that Marion had a mind free from prejudice; she had also a mind quick and keen in its power of apprehension. She caught the drift and force of Earle's statements before any one else

did, and said to herself, "That must be true!" Yet, even while she listened with attention, it was characteristic of her that she also observed with amusement the scene which the group before her presented. Mr. Singleton, leaning back in his chair, was frowning with impatience, and the air of one who through courtesy only lends an unwilling ear. Tom Singleton was watching his cousin with an expression compounded of surprise, curiosity, and an involuntary admiration; while Mrs. Singleton looked down demurely at a fan which she opened and shut, her lips wearing a smile of mingled amusement and gratification.

In the midst of this group Earle, with an air of the most quiet composure, was laying down his propositions one after another, unobservant of and indifferent to the expressions on the different faces around him. "He is very brave," thought Marion; "but surely he is also very foolish. Why should he unnecessarily contradict and vex the old man, who can do so much for him?" A sense of irritation mingled with the admiration which she could not withhold from him. "It would have been easy to say nothing," she thought again; "and yet how well he speaks!"

He did indeed speak well — so well that the attention of Mr. Singleton was gradually drawn from the matter to the manner of his speech. He turned and looked keenly at the young man from under his bent brows.

"You speak," he said, "like an advocate of the cause. How is that?"

"I hope that I should be an advocate of any cause which I believed to be just," answered Brian, quietly;

“but I am in a special manner the advocate of this, because I am a Catholic.”

“A Catholic!” Mr. Singleton looked as if he could hardly believe the evidence of his ears. “It is not possible that you mean a *Romanist*?”

Earle bent his head, smiling a little. “I mean just that,” he said; “or at least what *you* mean by that. The term is neither very correct nor very courteous, but it expresses the fact clearly enough.”

This coolness had the usual effect of provoking Mr. Singleton, yet of making him feel the uselessness of expressing vexation. It was evident that his disgust was as great as his surprise, but he waited a moment before giving expression to either. Then he said, curtly:—

“It is no affair of mine what you choose to call yourself, but I should have more respect for your sense if you told me you were a Buddhist ”

“Very likely,” returned Earle, with composure; “for in that case I should be following the last whim of fashionable intellectual folly. But, you see, I thought it more sensible to go back to the old faith of our fathers.”

“You might have gone back to paganism, then,” sneered the other. “That was the faith of our fathers also.”

“Very true,” assented the young man; “and in that also I should have been following a large train. But I was not in search of a faith simply because it had been that of my fathers. I was in search of a faith which bore the marks of truth, and I found it to be that which some of my fathers unfortunately discarded.”

“And you have absolutely joined the Church of Rome?” demanded Mr. Singleton, with ominous calmness.

“Yes,” Earle replied, as calmly; “some months ago.”

The elder man took up a newspaper. “In that case,” he observed, in a tone of icy coldness, “I have nothing more to say. The step is one with which I have no sympathy and very little tolerance; but, fortunately, it does not concern me at all.”

Mrs. Singleton shot a glance at her husband, which Marion saw was one of triumph. She knew instantly that the conversation which led to Earle’s avowal had not been a matter of accident. “What a pretty trick!” she said, mentally, and, with a sudden impulse to show her sympathy with courage, she addressed the young man:—

“You have at least the pleasure of knowing, Mr. Earle, that you belong to the same faith as most of the best and many of the greatest people of the world.”

Earle looked at her with surprise. Such a speech, under the circumstances, was the last he could have expected from her; for, notwithstanding the glamour of her beauty, he had read her accurately enough to perceive her worldliness, and her desire for all that the world could give. He knew that she was a favorite of his uncle’s, and could not have imagined that she would brave the displeasure of the latter in a manner so unnecessary. Perhaps Mr. Singleton was also surprised— at least he glanced up at her quickly, while Earle answered:—

“It is a deeper satisfaction still to believe that it is

a faith which has made the best of those people what they are, and which can derive no lustre from the greatest."

"I have always observed that Roman Catholics are very enthusiastic about their religion," said Mrs. Singleton; "but I did not know before, Marion, that you inclined that way."

"What way?" asked Marion, coolly. "To enthusiasm or to Catholicity? As a matter of fact, I do not incline to either. But I have seen a great deal of Catholics, and admire many things about them. Indeed, all of my best friends belong to that religion."

"Then we may expect you to follow in Brian's footsteps before long," said the lady, with malicious sweetness.

"There is nothing that I am aware of more improbable," replied Marion.

She rose then, conscious that the conversation, if carried farther, might develop more unpleasantness, and moved toward the piano. Earle followed her, in order to lift the lid of the instrument, and as he did so said, smilingly: —

"I think you are quite right to endeavor to restore harmony by sweet sounds. Is it not extraordinary that there should be no such potent cause of discord in the world as a question of religion?"

"I suppose it is because people feel more strongly on that subject than on any other," she answered, looking up at him, and wondering a little that a man so young, with all the world before him, and all its ambitions to tempt him, should think of religion at all.

The next day she found an opportunity to say this frankly. During the morning she strolled into the

garden with a book, and there encountered Earle, leaning on a stone-wall that skirted the lower boundaries of the grounds, sketching a pretty meadow and group of trees beyond. She came upon him unobserved — for he was standing with his back to the path along which she advanced,—and the sound of her clear, musical voice was the first intimation he had of her presence.

“How rapidly you sketch, Mr. Earle, and how well!” she said.

He started and turned, to find her standing so near that she overlooked his work. She smiled as his astonished eyes met her own. “Do I disturb you?” she asked. “If so I will go away.”

“You have certainly not disturbed me up to the present moment,” he answered. “Have you been here long?”

“Only a few minutes. You were so absorbed that you did not observe me, and I was so interested in watching you that I did not care to speak. But if I disturb you —”

“Why should you disturb me if you care to stay? You will not obstruct my view of the meadow or trees. It is a pretty little scene, is it not?”

“Very,” she answered, moving to the wall, at which she paused, a few feet distant from him, and laid her book down on the ledge which it conveniently presented. Then she stood silent for a minute, looking at the shadow-dappled landscape, and conscious of a sense of pique, provoked by the cool indifference of his reply. She knew that to many men her presence *would* obstruct their view of the fairest scene nature might present, and she could perceive no reason why this

man should be different from them,— why her beauty, which his artist-glance had evidently appreciated, seemed to have so little effect upon him. Her vanity had become more insistent in its demands, from the homage which had been offered her; and the withholding this homage had already become a thing insufferable. But she was far too proud to show this, as many weaker women do; and, after a short interval, she said, lightly enough:—

“What a very great pleasure it must be when one is able to set down beauty as you are doing—to preserve and make it one’s own! I have a friend who loves art devotedly—in fact, she is a true artist,—and I have always the same feeling when I watch her at work.”

“The power is certainly a great delight,” said Earle, going on with his rapid strokes; “but you must not imagine that it is all delight. There is a great deal of drudgery in this as in all other arts; and, worse still, there are times of infinite disgust as well as profound discouragement.”

“So Claire used to say—at least, she spoke of discouragement, but I never heard her speak of disgust.”

“Claire!” Earle looked at her now with his quick, bright glance. “I wonder if I do not know of whom you speak. There can hardly be more than one Claire who is a true artist.”

“There may be a hundred, for aught I know,” replied Marion, carelessly; “but I mean Claire Alford. Her father was a distinguished artist, I believe. You may have heard of him.”

“Everyone has heard of him, I imagine,” returned

Earle, a little dryly; "but I knew him well in my boyhood, and he did more than any one else to fan whatever artistic flame I possess. I was, therefore, very glad when I chanced to meet his daughter about a month ago."

"You met Claire? That can hardly be! She is abroad."

"I met her a few days before she sailed. The lady with whom she has gone, and with whom she was then staying, is the widow of an artist whom I knew, and is herself a great friend of mine."

"And so you have met Claire! I really don't know why it should surprise me, yet it does. What did you think of her? I ask the question without hesitation, because I know it is impossible for any one to think ill of her, and the well is only in proportion as you know or divine her."

"I am sure of that," said Earle, with a kindly smile for the speaker. "She charmed me at first sight: she is so simple, so candid, so unconscious of herself, so evidently intent upon high aims."

"Yes, she is all of that," replied Marion. Involuntarily her voice fell as she thought of how little any word of this commendation could be applied to herself. "Did you find out that you had something in common beside your love of art?" she asked, after an instant. "Claire is a fervent Catholic."

"Is she?" he said, with interest. "No, I did not discover it. Nothing brought up the subject of religion. But I am not surprised. There is an air about her that made me call her in my own mind a vestal of art. I can easily realize that she is something more and better than that."

“It is a pretty name, and suits her well — a vestal of art,” said Marion. She was silent then for a minute or two, and stood looking with level gaze from under the broad brim of her sun-hat at the pastoral meadow-scene, unconscious for once what a picture she herself made, as she leaned on the stone-wall, with a spreading mulberry-tree throwing its chequered shade down upon her graceful figure. Artist instinct drew Earle’s eyes upon her, and he was saying to himself, “How much I should like to sketch her! Shall I ask her permission to do so?” when she suddenly turned her face toward him and spoke.

“Do you know, Mr. Earle,” she said, “that you astonished me very much last night? For the matter of that” — with a slight laugh, — “I suppose you astonished everyone. But I am bold enough to express my astonishment, because I should really like to know what you meant.”

“I shall be very happy to tell you,” Earle answered, “if you will give me an idea what *you* mean.”

“I mean this. Why did you vex Mr. Singleton by unnecessary contradiction, and an unnecessary avowal of what you knew would annoy if it did not seriously alienate him?”

The young man regarded her with surprise. “Simply because I had no alternative,” he replied. “Nothing was further from my desire than to vex him. But why, in the name of all that is reasonable, should people be vexed by hearing the truth? Is not that what we all wish, ostensibly at least — to learn and to believe *the truth* about a thing, not mere fancies or ideas?”

“Ye—s,” said Marion, hesitatingly. “I suppose no one would acknowledge that he did not wish to

know the truth; but you are aware that nothing is more offensive than the truth to people who have strong convictions against it."

"So much the worse for such people, then."

"And so much the worse sometimes for those who persist in enforcing enlightenment upon them."

"I really do not think that is my character," he said. "I have never, to my knowledge, attempted to force enlightenment upon any one. But sometimes — as was the case last night — one must speak (even when speaking will serve no end of conviction), or be guilty of cowardice and tacit deception."

Marion shook her head, in protest, apparently, against these views; but probably she felt the uselessness of combating them. At least when she spoke again it was to say, abruptly: —

"But how on earth do you chance to take that particular view of truth?"

CHAPTER XVI.

EARLE smiled. "The answer to that is contained in what I remarked a moment ago," he said. "I wanted *truth itself*, not my own or anybody's else views or fancies concerning it."

Marion looked at him with a gravity on her face which gave it a new character altogether. "And do you really think that you found this absolute truth in the Catholic faith?" she asked.

"I do not think so — I *know* it," he answered. "It is there or nowhere. I satisfied myself of that."

"But how did you come to care enough about it to think of satisfying yourself?" she persisted. "That is what puzzles me most. The Catholic faith may be true — I can readily believe it is, — but how did you, a young man with the world all before you, ever come to care whether it were true or not?"

He regarded her silently for a moment before replying. It seemed as if he found it difficult to answer such words as these. At length he said: "Is there any special reason why a young man, even if it were true that he had all the world before him — and it is true in a very limited sense of me, — should not think occasionally of the most important subject in the world, and should not desire to think rightly?"

“Of course there is no reason why he should not,” she replied. “Only it seems unnatural. One fancies him thinking of other things. In his place, *I* should think of other things.”

“May I ask what they would be?”

“I am sure you can hardly need to ask. Even if you have no ambition yourself, you must realize its existence; you must know how it makes men desire fame and power and wealth for the sake of the great advantages they bring. In your place, *I* should think of making a name, of conquering fortune, of enjoying all that the world offers.”

“Well,” he said, after a short pause — during which he had gone on with the rapid, practiced strokes of his pencil,— “all that is natural enough, and there is no harm in it unless one wished to enjoy some of the unlawful things which the world offers. But why should one not do all this — make a name and conquer fortune — and still give some thought to the great question of one’s final end and destiny?”

She made a slight gesture of impatience. “You know very well,” she said, “that, as a matter of fact, an ambitious man has no time for considering such questions.”

“That depends entirely upon the man. You should not make your assertions so sweeping. In these days, at least, no man of thought — no man who is at all interested in intellectual questions — can ignore the subject of religion. Let me illustrate my meaning. Would you have been surprised to learn that *I* were an Agnostic or a Positivist?”

“No,” she replied, somewhat reluctantly. “That would have been different.”

“ Only different because they are fashionable creeds of the hour, and it is considered a proof of intellectual strength to stultify reason, and, in the face of the accumulated proofs of ages, to declare that man can know nothing of his origin or his end. But when, on the contrary, one accepts a logical and luminous system of thought, a revelation which offers an explanation of the mystery of being entirely consistent with reason, you think that very remarkable! Forgive me, Miss Lynde, if I say that I find your opinion quite as remarkable as you can find my faith.”

She blushed, but answered haughtily: “ That may be. It was no doubt presumptuous of me to express any opinion on the subject. I really don’t know why I did it, except that I was so much surprised, in the first place by the fact that you had thought of the matter, and in the second place by the avowal which vexed your uncle.”

“ I am sorry to have vexed him,” said Earle, quietly; “ but he is too much of a philosopher to allow it to trouble him long — indeed I have no idea that it has troubled him at all.”

She did not answer, but the expression in her eyes was one of so much wonder that he smiled. “ What is it now?” he asked. “ What are you still surprised at?”

“ I hardly like to tell you,” she replied. “ I feel as if I had already said too much — ”

“ By no means. I like frankness, of all things; especially if I may be allowed to imitate it.”

She smiled in spite of herself. “ That,” she said, “ is certainly as little as one could allow. Well, then, I confess that I do not understand why you should

refuse to accept the fortune which Mr. Singleton evidently wishes so much to give you. Have you conscientious scruples against holding wealth?"

"Not the faintest. I would accept a million, if it came to me unfettered by conditions which would make even a million too dearly bought."

"Such as—?"

"What my uncle asks — that I give up everything which interests me in life, and devote myself to him as long as he lives."

"But he cannot live long. And then —"

"Then I should be a rich man. But, as it chances, I do not care about being a rich man. Money can not buy anything which I desire. It cannot give me the proficiency in art which must be won by long and hard study."

"It would make that study unnecessary."

"Unnecessary!" He glanced at her with something of her own wonder, dashed by faint scorn. "Do you think that I consider *making money* the end of my art? So far from that, I would starve in a garret sooner than lower my standard for such an object. And, insensibly perhaps, I should lower it if I had a great deal of money. No man can answer for himself. Therefore, I have no desire to be tempted. And I repeat that money can buy nothing which I value most."

"Do you not value power? It can buy that."

"In a very poor form. I am not sure that I should care for it in its best form, but certainly not in that which money buys."

"Money is the lever which moves the world," she said; "and it is only because you have never known the real want of it that you hold it so lightly."

“ I have sometimes thought that myself,” he replied. “ It is true that only a starving man properly appreciates bread. I have never starved, and it may be that I am not properly grateful for mine; but, at least, I try neither to undervalue nor overvalue it.”

“ Some day,” she said, “ you may find an object which money would have helped you to gain, and then you will regret the folly — forgive me if I speak plainly — which threw away such a great power.”

“ I should have to change very much,” he replied, “ before I could care for any object which money would help me to gain.”

“ There is nothing more likely than that you will change on that point. If there is anything that life teaches, it is that there is scarcely a single object which money will not help us to gain.”

He looked at her with a curious surprise, which he did not attempt to conceal. “ Forgive *me*,” he said, “ if I speak too plainly; but there is a remarkable want of harmony between your appearance and your utterances. If one listened with closed eyes, one might fancy that a man of fifty spoke in behalf of the god to whom he had devoted his life. But when one looks at you — ”

“ You are surprised that such sentiments should come from one who ought to be ignorant of every reality of life,” she observed, coolly, as he paused. “ But I learned something about those realities at a very early age. I know how the want of money has embittered my life; I know how it lays on me now fetters under which I chafe; and therefore, by right of the experience which you lack, I tell you that you

will live to regret the loss of the fortune you are throwing away."

"No man can speak with absolute certainty of the future; but, if I know myself at all, I do not think I shall ever regret it."

She shrugged her shoulders slightly. "In that case you will be an extraordinary man," she said. "But I feel as if I should beg your pardon for having fallen into such a personal vein of discussion."

"I do not think that the responsibility rests with you," he answered. "But if you consider that you owe me an apology, I can point out an immediate way to make amends. Ever since you have been standing there, I have been longing to make a sketch of you. Will you allow me to do so?"

"Certainly," she said, smiling; for the request flattered her vanity.

So, while she stood in the sunshine and shadow, a charming picture of youth and grace, he sketched her, feeling with every stroke the true artist appreciation of her beauty; and more and more surprised at her intelligence as they talked of art and literature, of people and events, while time flew by unheeded.

Meanwhile Mr. Singleton was certainly wroth with his favorite. The latter's change of religion — or, to be more correct, his choice of religion — was the last of many offenses; and the old man said to himself that, so far as he was concerned, it should indeed be the last. "The boy is a fool, besides being obstinate and ungrateful!" he thought, with what he felt to be righteous indignation, and which (knowing his own weakness in regard to Earle) he strove to encourage and fan into enduring anger. "But I am glad I have

discovered this in time — very glad! Though he has refused so positively to do anything that I wish, there is no telling what weakness I might have been guilty of when it came to the point of making my will. But now I am safe. My money shall never go into the hands of the Jesuits — that I am resolved upon. And, of course, they would soon obtain it from Brian, who has no appreciation whatever of its value. Yes, my mind is settled at last on that score. He shall never inherit anything from me; but where on earth am I to find a satisfactory legatee to take his place?"

The consideration of this question, and the difficulty of answering it, produced in old Mr. Singleton a state of temper which made life a burden, for the time being, to all his personal attendants. While Earle was philosophically setting forth his views to Marion at the bottom of the garden, the valet and the nurse were having a very hard time in getting the fractious invalid ready for the day; and when he was finally established in his sitting-room, he probably remembered the soothing power of music, and asked for Miss Lynde.

Diligent search having revealed the fact that Miss Lynde was not in the house, Mr. Singleton wanted to know if any one could tell him where she had gone. Mrs. Singleton, being interrogated, professed utter ignorance; but one of the maids volunteered the information that from an upper window she had seen Miss Lynde in the garden with Mr. Earle. That had been an hour before. "Go to the same window and see if she is there yet," ordered Mr. Singleton when this was communicated to him. Observation duly made, and a report brought to him that she was still there, "Shall I send for her, sir?" inquired his servant.

“No,” snapped the irate old gentleman. “What do you mean by such a question? Why should I wish to disturb Miss Lynde? I simply desired to satisfy myself where she was. When she comes in, let her know that I would like to see her.”

Left alone then, he opened his newspapers with a softening of the lines about his mouth. After all, a way might be found of managing Brian. The influence of a beautiful woman might accomplish what his own influence had failed to do. Marion would make a capital wife for the young man. “Just the wife he needs,” thought Mr. Singleton. “A woman of ambition, of cleverness, and of worldly knowledge quite remarkable in one so young. No danger of *her* undervaluing money, and the Jesuit would be very sharp who could get it from her. Why did I not think of this before? Of course he will fall in love with her — what man could avoid doing so? — and, in that event, everything can be arranged. *She* will bring him to my terms soon enough.”

These reflections had so soothing an effect upon his temper that when Marion came in, and was told by Mrs. Singleton that *he* (with a significant gesture toward the apartment of the person indicated) was in the mood of a tiger, and demanding her presence, she was most agreeably surprised at being received with extreme kindness.

“I am told you have been asking for me. I am sorry to have been out of the way,” she said.

“I wanted to ask you to sing for me,” he replied. “My nerves are in an irritated state this morning, and I felt as if your voice might soothe them. But I am not unreasonable enough to expect you to be always

on hand to gratify my fancies. It was well that you were out enjoying this beautiful morning."

"I was only in the garden. You might have sent for me. I should have been delighted to come and sing for you. Shall I do so now?"

"After a little. Sit down and let me talk to you for a few minutes. I suppose you can imagine what it is that gave me a particularly bad night, and has set my nerves on edge this morning?"

"I am afraid that it is worry," said Marion, sitting down near him. "You did not like what Mr. Earle said last night."

"I certainly did not like it. The announcement he made was a great surprise to me and a great shock. Under any circumstances, I should be sorry for any one in whom I felt an interest to take such a step; but you are probably aware that I have felt a peculiar interest in Brian."

"I have heard that your intentions toward him have been most kind."

"I have desired that he shall take with me the place of a son. I have asked him to accept the duties of such a position — duties that would not be very heavy, — and I have promised that, in return, he shall inherit everything that is mine. Do you think that an unreasonable proposal?"

"Very far from it," answered Marion. "I think it most reasonable and most kind. I can not understand how he can hesitate over it."

"He does not hesitate," said Mr. Singleton, bitterly: "he refuses it. After that I ought to be willing to let him go; but the truth of the matter is, I have no one to take his place. He is not only my

nearest relative, but there is something about him that attaches one to him despite one's self. My dear" — he looked wistfully, yet keenly, into the beautiful face,— "it has occurred to me that perhaps *you* might have some influence over him."

"I!" exclaimed Marion. For a moment her surprise was so great that she could say nothing more. Then, with the realization of his meaning, a wave of color came into her face. "I have no reason to suppose that I have the least influence with Mr. Earle," she said. "If I had, I would gladly use it for the ends about which you are so anxious."

"I am sure of that," observed Mr. Singleton, significantly. "Well, all I can say is that nothing would please me more than for you to acquire such influence. If you should acquire it, and if you should consent to use it always, I would be a very delighted old man. You understand me, I see, so I need say no more. Now go and sing for me."

CHAPTER XVII.

M R. SINGLETON was wise enough to remain satisfied with having expressed his wishes to Marion. He said nothing to Earle, having a general conviction that "in vain is the snare spread in sight of any bird," and a knowledge of this particular bird which warned him to be cautious. But the idea which had occurred to him seemed so likely to produce the desired result, that he was greatly encouraged by it, and his manner to his nephew was so different from what Mrs. Singleton had anticipated, that she said to herself with much chagrin that Tom was right after all, and she had gained nothing by the disclosure she had brought about.

Earle himself was pleased that his uncle showed no coldness of feeling toward him. He had fully expected this; and, while the anticipation had not troubled him in any serious manner, he was relieved to find that he was to be spared that sense of alienation which is always a trial to a person of sensitive feelings.

What he would have thought had his uncle at this time frankly avowed to him the plan he had conceived, it is not difficult to imagine. What he would have done is no less easy to conjecture. But, left in ignorance, and exposed to an association which would have

had attractions for any one, he unconsciously drifted toward a position destined to lead to serious results. For while Marion repelled she also attracted him, through the interest he felt in a character so strongly marked for good or for evil, and by the very frankness with which she displayed traits and expressed sentiments with which he had little sympathy. "It is a fine character warped and distorted," he said to himself. "Good influences might do much with it. What a pity if she drifts deeper into the worldliness that now attracts her so greatly! For there is nothing frivolous about her, and she will find in the end that none but frivolous people can be contented with the things for which she longs."

Now, there are a few people who, brought into contact with a character of which they think in this manner, do not feel inclined to exert the influence that they believe would be beneficial. And how much more when the person on whom it is to be exerted is a young, a beautiful and a clever woman! Whether he approved of her or not, Earle could not fail to find Marion a stimulating and agreeable companion. The absence of effort to attract — for she was far too proud to make this — lulled to rest any fear of the result of such an association to himself; and their morning conversation in the garden was the beginning of an intercourse which grew daily more pleasant on both sides.

Mr. Singleton had been the first to see the probable end, but it was not long before others foresaw it also. "I told you that girl would betray us," said Mrs. Singleton to her husband. "She means to marry Brian Earle and take our place. That is clear."

“But there may be two words to that,” said the gentleman addressed. “Brian may not intend to marry *her*. He was talking of his plans to me while we were smoking last night, and there was not a word of marrying in them.”

“That much for his plans!” said Mrs. Singleton, with a slight, contemptuous gesture. “They will soon be whatever Marion Lynde chooses. When a woman like her makes up her mind to marry a man, she will succeed. You may be sure of that.”

“Rather a bad lookout for men, in such a case,” returned Mr. Singleton. “Only if the power is limited to women like Miss Lynde, one might bear it with philosophy.”

His wife gave him a look compounded of scorn and irritation. “There is not much doubt what you would do in Brian Earle’s place. That girl seems to turn the head of every man she comes in contact with. I am sure I wish I had never heard of her!”

“I fancy Rathborne wishes the same thing,” observed Mr. Singleton. “I never saw a man so changed as he is of late; I met him yesterday, and I was struck by his moody looks.”

Mrs. Singleton shrugged her shoulders. “I have no compassion to spare for him. A man who has been such a fool as he has, deserves to suffer. But *we* have done nothing to deserve to be supplanted in this way.”

“Well,” said the more reasonable husband, “it is hardly just to talk of being ‘supplanted.’ The old fellow has always been very frank with me, and insisted there should be no room for misconception. We have an agreeable home without any expense to

ourselves, but he has always told me that he did not bind himself to leave me anything at all."

"Of course he would not bind himself; but if Brian refuses to be his heir—and that is what his conduct heretofore amounts to,—whose chance should be better than yours?"

"Really it is hard to say. Who can account for the whims of rich old men? He may cut us all off, and leave his fortune to Miss Lynde."

"If I thought so," said Mrs. Singleton, fiercely, "I would murder her—"

"Come, Anna, that is beyond a joke!"

"Or myself, for having brought her to his notice."

"Defer both murders until you find out whether there is any need for them," said her provoking husband. And then he beat a hasty retreat.

But even he, now that his eyes were opened, began to perceive the extreme probability of all that his wife suggested. There was no doubt of the fact that Marion and Earle were constantly together, that they seemed to find much gratification in each other's society, and that Mr. Singleton (this was patent to the most careless observation) looked on approvingly at their growing intimacy. "The old fellow wants to see the thing brought about," said Tom Singleton to himself. "He thinks it would tie Brian down, and that a wife with such ideas would soon cure him of his contempt for riches. Well, he's right enough; and since it is most likely to come about, Anna and I may make up our minds that our day is nearly over. We shall soon have to step down to make room for Mrs. Brian Earle."

The young lady designated in advance by this title

was herself entirely of his opinion. At this time a rosy vista opened before her. She felt that all which she most desired was within her grasp. And yet not exactly in the manner she had anticipated. For, much as she had always longed for the power which wealth gives, it had not been her dream to obtain wealth by marriage. That seemed to her a means too commonplace, and also too degrading. It was to be won through her own effort, her own cleverness, in some manner as vaguely outlined as a fairy-tale. But she was too shrewd not to perceive, after a very brief acquaintance with life, that for a young girl, without some special and brilliant talent, to hope to *make* a fortune was as reasonable as if she had thought of building a tower with her own hands. She realized, then, that it was a wonderful prospect which opened before her, as if by the stroke of an enchantress' wand, in the fancy of Mr. Singleton for herself, and in the fact that Earle excited her regard in a degree she had hardly imagined possible. . Once, with mocking cynicism, she had asked of Helen, "Do you think such good fortune ever befalls one, as that the man one could love is also the man it is expedient for one to marry?" And now that good fortune, so utterly disbelieved in, had befallen herself!

For the very things in which Earle was least like herself attracted her most. He was an embodiment of ideas which, abstractly, were too exalted for her to reach. His faith, his unworldliness, his devotion to noble ends,—all touched the higher side of her own nature, like strains of heroic poetry. Under his immediate influence, she began to change in a manner as strange as it was significant. Keen eyes noted this, and

Mrs. Singleton said to herself that the girl was capable of playing any part, even of pretending to be quixotic and unworldly. But in this she did her injustice. With all its great faults, Marion's character possessed the saving salt of sincerity, and she was absolutely incapable of playing a part for any purpose whatever. The change in her just now was real; there only remained a question whether or not it were deep,—whether human love alone were great enough to work the miracle of regenerating a nature into which worldliness had struck such strong roots.

The test was not long delayed. As the time for Earle's visit drew to a close, he began to realize how decidedly he had suffered himself to be drawn toward this girl, whom his judgment at first so greatly disapproved, and whom it could not even yet altogether approve; although he was not blind to the change in her wrought by his influence,—a change which unconsciously flattered him, as any proof of power flatters this poor human nature of ours. He found, somewhat to his dismay, that he was more attached to her than he had been aware of, but he had no intention of declaring his feeling. Judgment was still too much arrayed against it. And this being so, he resisted the temptation to prolong his visit, and adhered to the original date set for his departure. Now, since this departure was not only to be from Scarborough, but from America, Mr. Singleton was very anxious that it should be prevented, and he watched with growing anxiety the intimacy with Marion, from which he hoped so much.

“My dear,” he said to her one day when they were alone together, and she had been singing for him, “I

wish you would exert your influence with Brian to keep him from going abroad. It would be much better that he should remain here."

"There can be no doubt of that," she replied. "But you mistake in thinking that I have any influence with him. If I had, I would use it as you desire."

"I am afraid," he observed, "that you underrate your influence. I think you have more than you suppose."

"No," she said. "I have always been accustomed to influencing those around me, and therefore I know very well when I fail to do so. I fail with Mr. Earle. He has no respect for my opinion, as indeed"—with unwonted humility—"why should he have?"

The man of the world uttered a contemptuous laugh. "Do you really, with all your cleverness, know so little of men as to fancy that respect for a woman's opinion is a necessary part of her influence?" he asked.

"With most men I suppose it is not," she answered; "but with Mr. Earle it is. I am sure of that, and also sure that I should not care to influence a man who had no respect for my opinion."

"That opinion is not worthy of your good sense," said Mr. Singleton. "It does not matter at all *how* one influences people, so that one actually does manage to influence them. The important point is to succeed."

"Have you found it an easy thing to succeed with Mr. Earle?" asked Marion, a little maliciously.

"Very far from it," replied Mr. Singleton. "There is only one way to influence him, and that is through his affections. For one to whom he is attached, he will do much."

The last words were so significant that Marion colored and said no more. But she determined that she would test whether or not they were true, since she had by this time little doubt of Earle's sentiments toward her.

She had not long to wait for an opportunity. The next morning Earle asked if she would not go with him to complete a sketch that he was making of a bit of woodland scenery near the house. "A morning's work will finish it," he said. "And since I shall not have many more mornings, if you care to come, I shall be very glad."

"You know I always like to come," she answered. "It is interesting to me to watch your work. I feel as if I were witnessing the process of creation."

"You are witnessing *a* process of creation," he said. "Art is a ray of the divine genius which created nature, and, in its degree, it is creative also. That is the secret of its great fascination."

"It certainly seems to possess a great fascination for you," she said, as he slung his color-box over his shoulder and they set forth.

"Do you wonder at it?" he asked, with a quick glance.

"No; I do not wonder at the fascination," she replied. "I only wonder that you think it right to sacrifice everything else to it."

"What do I sacrifice to it?" he asked. "A little money for which I have no use. Is not that all?"

She shook her head. "By no means all. You sacrifice the dearest wish of your uncle, who is devoted to you — the power of giving him great pleasure, and the power also of doing much good with

the money you despise. Have you ever thought of that?"

"Yes," he answered, "I have thought of it all. I have seriously asked myself if there is any duty demanding that I should comply with his wishes, and I have decided that there is none. He is certainly attached to me, but I think that his attachment rests very much on the fact that he can not control me as he is accustomed to control most people. There is no real congeniality of sentiment between us. He is a man of the world; I am a man to whom the world counts very little. I can not feign interest in the things which interest him, and he scorns all that most deeply interests me. Under these circumstances, what pleasure to either of us would be gained by closer association? And you know it is out of my power to do him any real service."

"I am not sure of that," said Marion. "I think you scarcely appreciate either his strong attachment to you or his strong desire that you should remain with him."

"Has he been asking you to be his advocate?" said Earle, with a smile. "It sounds very much as if he had"

"He has been talking to me of the matter," she answered. "You know it is very near his heart, and he speaks to me more freely than to you; for, naturally, he is wounded by your refusal, and is too proud to acknowledge to you how much he cares."

"And he thinks, no doubt, that what you say will have a weight which his words lack."

"There is no reason why he should think so," said Marion, rather proudly.

They had by this time reached the place of their destination; and, as he put down the portable easel which he carried, she turned away, saying to herself that it was indeed true — there was no reason why any one should think that her words had the least weight with this immovable man. Some hot tears of mortification gathered in her eyes. She had hoped for a different result, and the disappointment, from the proof of her own lack of power, was greater than she had anticipated. She bent down to gather some ferns on the bank of a little stream which flowed through the glen, and when she rose Earle was standing beside her.

“I fear that perhaps you misunderstood my last words,” he said, with grave gentleness. “I did not mean to imply that my uncle was mistaken in thinking that what you say would have great weight with me. He is too shrewd not to be sure of that. I only gave him credit for choosing his advocate well. For you must know that what you wish has great influence with me.”

“Why should I know it?” said Marion, in a low tone.

“Because,” he answered, “you must know that I love you.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VERY gratified man was Mr. Singleton when he heard how matters stood between Marion and his nephew. Indeed, with regard to the latter, his feeling was chiefly one of exultation. "Now I have you!" he said to himself; and it was with difficulty that he refrained from uttering this sentiment when Earle announced the fact of his engagement. What he did say was:—

"I am delighted, my dear boy — delighted! You could not have pleased me better. Miss Lynde is a girl to do credit to any man's taste, and to any position to which she may be raised. Her family is unexceptionable; and as for fortune — well, you have no need to think of that."

Brian smiled. "I have not thought of it," he said; "but I fear she may think a little of the fact that I have not much to offer her. To become the wife of a struggling artist is not a very brilliant prospect for one of her ambition."

Mr. Singleton frowned. So, after all, the thing had not settled itself, but was to be fought over again! "You must surely be jesting when you speak of such a prospect for her," he observed. "You must feel that marriage brings responsibility with it; and that,

since the future of this charming girl is bound up with your own, you can no longer afford to indulge in caprices."

"I do not think that I have ever indulged in caprices," replied Earle. "In settling my plan of life, I have followed what I believe to be right, as well as what I believed to be best. And I have no intention of changing it now. Marion understands that in accepting me, she also accepts my life. I am sure of that."

"I am by no means sure of it," thought Mr. Singleton; but he was wise enough to say no more, and bide his time to speak to Marion.

"My dear," he said to her, as soon as they were alone together, "you know that the arrangement between Brian and yourself meets with my warmest approval. But it will be of very little good to me personally, unless you mean to use your influence — for you can no longer say that you possess none — to induce him to yield to my wishes. Unless he does so, he can expect nothing from me in the future. And that I should regret for your sake now as well as his."

"You are very kind," said Marion, who understood all that was implied in this. "Be certain that if he does not yield to your wishes, it will not be my fault. I shall use all the influence I possess to induce him to do so."

"In that case I have no fear," said the old man, gallantly. "Who could resist you?"

A little while before Marion would have echoed this with a profound conviction of her own irresistible power; but now, though she did not dissent from it,

she had a lurking fear that Brian Earle might not prove so elastic in her hands as his uncle hoped. As yet, by tacit consent, the subject of their future life had been avoided; but she knew that the time would come when it must be discussed, and she said to herself with passionate resolution that he should not throw away the fortune which was offered him, if it were in her power to prevent it.

Had this resolution needed a spur, Mrs. Singleton's congratulations would have given it. "I hope that you will be very happy," she said; "and I think it is very good for me to hope it, for you step into my place. Brian will not go abroad *now*."

"We have not settled that as yet," replied Marion, who detected a questioning tone in the last assertion.

"I think that, in your place, I should settle it as soon as possible," said Mrs. Singleton. "It will be pleasanter for all parties. Although, of course, Brian's decision is a foregone conclusion."

"You not only hope, you believe the contrary," thought Marion; "but I will show you that you are mistaken."

Meanwhile Earle, unconscious of the struggle before him, was thinking how much he had misjudged Marion in believing her so worldly, since, knowing his definite decision with regard to his life, she was yet willing to share that life. The declaration which he had made was entirely unpremeditated; but, once made, he did not regret it. How indeed was it possible to regret that which brought immediately so much happiness to himself and to Marion? And it was too much to expect, perhaps, that he should ask whether or not this happiness rested on a very

substantial basis — whether there were not elements in it certain to produce discord as time went on. All that was hard, haughty and worldly in Marion seemed, for the time being, to have disappeared. Helen herself could hardly have seemed more gentle and tender to the man she loved.

On the Sunday following their betrothal, he asked her if she would go with him to church, and she readily assented. "I always liked Catholicity," she said, as they took their way thither; "and I always felt that if there was truth in any religion, it was in that. All the others are but poor shams and imitations of it, and I have had an instinctive scorn of them ever since I knew anything of the old faith. I am glad, therefore, that you are a Catholic."

"Since I am not an Agnostic," he said, laughing. "You would have had a higher opinion of my intellectual strength if I had avowed myself that, you know."

She laughed too. "That was before I understood you," she said; "and before I understood the grounds you had for your faith. But now I know that you could be only what you are."

"And when," he asked, in a tone suddenly grown grave and earnest, "will you also be that?"

"How can I tell?" she replied. "Should not faith be something more than a mere matter of intellectual conviction?"

"Faith is a gift of God," he said. "If you are willing to receive it, it will not be denied to you."

"I am willing now," she observed. "Always, heretofore, I have shrunk from it. I have felt the fascination of Catholicity, but I have dreaded what it

would demand from me. But now I dread no longer. I am willing to be what you are."

He smiled slightly, and, as they had reached the church by this time, extended his hand to lead her over the threshold. Then withdrawing it, "There!" he said; "I have done my part—I have brought you within the door. God must do the rest."

It seemed to Marion, as she knelt by him during Mass, as if God were doing this. Her heart opened to the influences around her as it had never opened before. The Holy Sacrifice had a meaning for her which it had never, up to this time, possessed; she forgot the plainness and bareness of the chapel, the unfashionable appearance of the people, in her consciousness of the Divine Reality before her on the altar. And when the priest, addressing the people at the end of Mass, spoke in plain and forcible language of the truths of faith, her mind replied by an assenting *Credo*.

But as he turned to preach, Father Byrne received a shock of unpleasant surprise in perceiving Marion's face by Brian Earle's side. He had not seen or heard of her since the occurrences which had ended Helen's engagement. He had not been aware that she still remained in Scarborough after her aunt's departure; but he had met Earle, and liked the young man so much that this unexpected appearance beside him of the girl who had destroyed her cousin's happiness, seemed to him a conjunction that boded no good. The sight distracted him so much that he hesitated over the opening words of his sermon. The hesitation was only momentary: he took a firm grasp of his subject, and began; but whenever his glance fell on those two

faces in one of the front pews, he said to himself, "Poor young man!" and asked himself if, knowing what he did, he should offer a warning to the object of his commiseration.

After Mass, giving the question some thought, he decided that if the opportunity for it arose, he would speak to Earle on the subject; but that he would take no steps to make an opportunity, since it might have been an accidental association, meaning little or nothing. And so the matter might have passed without result, had not Earle presented himself that afternoon at the pastoral residence. He had two motives for the visit — one was to see Father Byrne, with whom he had been most pleasantly impressed; the other, to ask for some book of instruction to put into Marion's hands. The good Father was a little disturbed by the appearance of his visitor: it seemed he was to be forced to deliver his warning — for he had no intention of receding from his agreement with his conscience. Therefore, after they had talked for some time on various subjects, and a slight pause occurred, he was on the point of beginning, when Earle anticipated him by speaking:—

"I must not weary you by a long visit, Father," he said, "knowing that Sunday is a day which makes many demands upon you. I have come not only for the pleasure of seeing you this afternoon, but to ask your advice on a matter of importance. I want a book which sets forth Catholic doctrine in a clear and attractive manner, for one disposed toward the Church. What work will best answer my purpose?"

Father Byrne named a work familiar to most Catholics, and of wide circulation; but Earle shook his

head. "That will not do at all. I want something of an intellectual character, and with the charm of literary excellence. Else it would have no effect on the person for whom I intend it."

"Perhaps if you told me something about the person," suggested the priest, "I could judge better what would be suitable."

"I want the book," Earle answered, "for a young lady of much more than ordinary intelligence, who has no Protestant prejudices to overcome, and who, I think, only needs to be instructed to induce her to embrace the Catholic faith."

Father Byrne's face changed at the words "a young lady." "Surely," he said, after an instant's hesitation, "you do not mean the young lady who was with you in church this morning?"

"Yes," replied Earle, surprised by the tone even more than by the question. "I mean Miss Lynde. Do you know her?"

"I know her slightly, but I know *of* her very well," answered the priest, gravely. "And I regret to say that I cannot imagine a more unpromising subject for conversion. My dear Mr. Earle, I think that you will waste your efforts in that direction. I hope I am not uncharitable, but I have little confidence in the sincerity of Miss Lynde's desire to know the truth."

"Why have you no confidence?" asked Earle, shortly, almost sternly.

The other looked distressed. It was a more unpleasant task than he had anticipated which he had set himself, but he felt bound in conscience to go through with it.

"Because," he replied, "I know that the young

lady has had ample opportunity to learn all about the Faith if she had desired to do so. She had been at school in a convent for some time, and she came here with her cousin, Miss Morley, who is a devoted Catholic." He paused a moment, then with an effort went on: "But it is not for this reason alone that I distrust her sincerity. I chance to know that she acted badly toward her cousin, that she was the cause of her engagement being broken, and she behaved with great duplicity in the whole matter."

"This is a very serious charge," said Earle. He held himself well under control, but the priest perceived that he was much moved. "Do you speak with positive knowledge of what you assert?"

"As positive as possible, with regard to the facts," Father Byrne answered. "Miss Morley broke her engagement because she heard the man to whom she was engaged making love to her cousin. She generously refrained from blaming the latter, but Mrs. Morley told me that Miss Lynde had undoubtedly made deliberate efforts to attract her daughter's lover. You will understand that I tell you this in confidence, and nothing but my sincere interest in you would induce me to tell it at all. You might readily hear it from others, however. It is, I believe, a notorious fact in Scarborough."

Earle was silent for a minute, looking down as if in thought, with his dark brows knitted, and his pleasant countenance overcast. The last words made him recall various hints and allusions of Mrs. Singleton's. They had produced little impression upon him at the time — not enough to cause him to inquire what they meant,— but now they came back with a force de-

rived from what he had just heard. With sudden clearness he recalled that Marion seemed to shrink from any mention of her cousin, and that he had seen her change color once or twice when some man was alluded to by Mrs. Singleton in very significant tones. Even if it had been possible to doubt the priest, who spoke with such evident reluctance, these things recalled by memory gave added weight to all that he said. Presently the young man looked up, and spoke with an effort:—

“I have no doubt you have meant kindly, Father, in speaking of this matter; but, if you please, we will not discuss it further. To return to the book—I see that I had better decide for myself what will be suitable. Something of Newman’s might answer, only he deals chiefly with Anglican difficulties; or perhaps Lacordaire’s great Conferences on the Church might be best.”

“That is rather a—formidable work,” said the Father, hesitatingly.

“Yes,” answered Earle; “but so splendid in its logic, so luminous in its style, that whoever reads it understandingly will need no other. But I must not detain you longer.”

He rose as he spoke, shook hands with the priest—who was uncertain whether or not to regret what he had done,—and took his departure.

Once outside he said to himself that the thing to do now was to go directly to Marion, and learn from her the true meaning of the story which had so deeply disturbed him. He felt loyally certain that, *as* he heard it, it could not be true,—that she could never willfully have drawn her cousin’s lover from his alle-

giance. At least he repeated this to himself more than once. But in his heart was a lurking doubt which he would not acknowledge,—a lurking recollection of the distrust he had felt toward her at first, and which lately had faded from his mind. Well, it would depend upon what she told him now whether this distrust were to be revived or finally banished.

It was late in the afternoon when he entered the grounds of the house in which Mr. Singleton dwelt; and the long, golden sunshine streamed so invitingly across emerald turf and bright flower-beds toward the green depths of shrubbery in the old garden, that he turned his steps in that direction, thinking it barely possible he might find Marion there, since she was partial to a seat under an arbor covered with climbing roses.

Some instinct must have guided his steps; for Marion *was* there, seated in the green shade, and so absorbed in reading that she did not perceive his approach. He paused for a minute to admire the beautiful picture which she made—a picture to delight an artist's eye,—asking himself the while if what looked so fair could possibly be capable of deceiving. It was a question that must be answered in one way or another, and, tightening his lips a little, he came forward.

She looked up with a slight start as he drew near, and the light of pleasure that came into her eyes was very eloquent. "So you have found me!" she said. "I thought that you might. I looked for you when I came out, but did not see you anywhere"

"I had gone into Scarborough," he answered. "I went to see"—he stopped before saying "Father

Byrne," with a sudden thought that it might not be well for her to connect the priest with the information of which he must presently speak — "to see a friend," he continued. "I wanted to borrow a book. What have you there?"

She held it out, smiling. "Helen gave it to me long ago," she said, "but I never looked at it until to-day."

Earle found that it was a translation of the admirable French "Catechism of Perseverance," which is one of the best compendiums of Catholic doctrine. "After all," he said, "I do not know that I can do better than this, although I was thinking of a book of another kind for you,— a book that would rouse your interest as well as instruct you."

"I think I should prefer your choice," she said. "Helen had the best intentions, but she forgot that what suited her would not be likely to suit me."

This repetition of Helen's name brought his attention back from the book to the subject it had replaced in his mind. "Helen!" he repeated. "You mean your cousin, Miss Morley?"

"Yes. You have heard me speak of her. She is a Catholic. It was with her that I came to Scarborough."

"And why has she gone away and left you?"

Something in the tone rather than in the words caused Marion to color with a quick sense of apprehension. "My aunt took her away for change of air and scene. They are wealthy, and can go where they like. I could not go with them, and so Mrs. Singleton kindly asked me to stay with her. That is very simple, is it not?"

“Very,” he answered. He looked down, and turned absently the leaves of the Catechism. “But, since you were your cousin’s guest, it seems to me it would have been simpler if she had asked you to go with her.”

“There were reasons why she did not,” said Marion. She hesitated a moment, and then an impulse of candor came to her,—a quick instinct that Earle must hear from herself the story which he had perhaps already heard from others. “I will tell you what they were,” she continued. “It is a matter which it is disagreeable to me to recall, but I should like to tell you about it.”

Then she told him. There is everything, as we know, in the point of view from which a picture is regarded, or a story is told; so it was not surprising that, as he listened, Earle felt a sense of infinite relief. If this were all, she was not indeed altogether free from blame — for she acknowledged that she had taken pleasure in the perception of Rathborne’s admiration,—but certainly she did not deserve that charge of duplicity which the priest had made. It was an unfortunate affair; but, feeling the power which she exercised over himself, how could he wonder that another man had felt and yielded to it?

So, for the time at least, all his doubt was dissipated, and Marion, satisfied with this result, deferred the decisive struggle yet to come.

CHAPTER XIX.

BUT it was not to be long deferred — that decisive struggle which Marion clearly foresaw, and from which she shrank, notwithstanding Mr. Singleton's confident assurance of her victory. It was a day or two later that Earle said to her:—

“Since I am going away soon, Marion, it will be well that we shall settle all details of our future. Can you not make an effort and go with me? What need is there, in our case, for long waiting, or for submitting to a separation which would be very painful?”

The confident assurance of his tone — as if dealing with a point settled beyond all need of argument — made Marion's heart sink a little, but she nerved herself to the necessary degree of resolution, and answered, quietly:—

“There will be no need for long waiting or for separation either, if you will only consent to do what your uncle asks — to remain with him, and fulfil the duty which most plainly lies before you.” She paused a moment, then added, in a softer tone, “You have refused to yield to his request, will you not yield to mine?”

Earle looked at her with eyes full of pained surprise. “*Et tu Brute!*” he said, with a faint smile.

“I thought you, at least, understood how firmly my mind is made up on that subject — how impossible it is for me to resign all my cherished plans of life for the sake of inheriting my uncle’s fortune.”

“But what is to prevent your painting as many pictures as you like and still gratifying him?” she asked.

“Because no man can serve two masters, in temporal any more than in spiritual things. If I am to serve Art, I must do so with all my strength, not in a half-hearted *dilettante* manner — but I am weary of saying these things. I hoped that by this time everyone understood them.”

“I understand them perfectly,” replied Marion; “but I do not think you are right. I think that, because you have never known the need or want of money, you are throwing away a fortune for a mere caprice, and you are condemning others as well as yourself to lifelong poverty.”

“Not to poverty,” he observed; “though certainly to narrower means than those my uncle possesses. It is for you to say whether or not you care to accept the life which I offer. I can not change it — I do not believe that even for you it would be best that I should.”

“You are very kind to settle what would be best for me so entirely in accordance with your own tastes and will,” she said, with her old tone of mockery. “May I ask why you are led to such a belief?”

“It is easily told,” he answered, “and I will be perfectly frank in the telling. We all have some one point where temptation assails us with more force than at any other. With you, Marion, that point is an undue value of wealth and of all the things of the world that wealth commands,— things, for the most part, of great

danger to one who does value them unduly. The possession of wealth, therefore, would be dangerous to you — more dangerous from the very strength of the passion with which you desire it. Forgive me if this sounds odiously like preaching, but it is true. I can not, then, change the whole intention and meaning of my life — give up my study of art and sink into a mere idle amateur — when by so doing I should gain nothing of value to myself, while working harm rather than good to you. Tell me that you believe I follow my conscience in this, and that you will be content with what I offer you?”

He held out his hand with a pleading gesture, but Marion would not see it. What he had said angered her more deeply than if he had let his refusal remain based solely on his own wishes. That he should recognize *hers*, yet coolly put them aside, reading her the while a moral lecture on their dangerous nature, filled her with a sense of passionate resentment.

“I might be content with what you offer,” she said, “if it were not that you could so easily offer more — you could so easily gratify me, whom you profess to love, as well as the old man who loves you so well. But you will not yield in the least degree to either of us. You follow your own wishes, and declare mine to be mercenary and dangerous. The difference between us is that I have known something of the poverty you regard so lightly; and, while I might risk enduring it with a man who had no alternative of escape from it, I do not think my prospect of happiness would be great with a man who condemned me to it for the gratification of his own selfishness.”

“Is that how the matter appears to you?” asked

Earle. He paused for a minute and seemed to consider. "You may be right," he said, presently; "I may be acting selfishly — what man can be absolutely certain of his own motives? — but, to the best of my judgment, I am doing what I believe to be right. I can not yield to my uncle in this matter — not even though he has secured you as his advocate. I am sure that if I did yield, it would be worse for all of us. No, Marion; forgive me if I seem hard, but you must take me as I am, or not at all. You must consent to share my life as I have ordered it, or it is best that you should not share it at all."

She bent her head with the air of one who accepts a final decision. "It is very good of you to put it so plainly," she said. "Your candor makes my decision very easy. The matter to me stands simply thus: you decline absolutely to make the least concession to my wishes, you sacrifice my happiness relentlessly to your own caprice, and yet you expect me to believe in the sincerity of your regard. I do not believe in it. I believe, indeed, that you have some kind of a fancy for me; but you think that, because I bring you nothing beside myself, you can make your own terms and order my life as it pleases you —"

"Marion!" cried Earle, shocked and startled. But she went steadily on:—

"That, however, is a mistake. If I bring nothing, I have in myself the power to win all things. I might give up all things for a man who truly loved me, and who was poor by no fault of his own. But for a man who loves me so little that he would condemn me uselessly to a sordid, narrow life — for that man I have only one word: go!"

She rose with a gesture, as if putting him from her; but Earle caught her extended hand.

“Marion!” he said, earnestly, “stop and think! You accuse me of selfishness, but is there no selfishness in your own conduct? In asking you to share my life as it is settled, I do not ask you to share poverty: I only do not promise you wealth. Do you care nothing for me without that wealth? Consider that I can only think you weigh me in the scale with my uncle’s fortune and without that fortune hold me of no account.”

“You must think what you please,” returned Marion. “I have told you how the matter appears to me. If you care for me, you will accept your uncle’s generous offer. That is my last word.”

“Then we can only part,” said Earle, dropping her hand. “It is evident that the love of money is more deeply rooted in you than love of me. God forgive you, Marion, and God bring you to some sense of the relative value of things! I have the presumption to think that what I give you is worth a little more than the fortune which you rate so highly. Some day you may learn how little money can really buy of what is best worth having in human life. In that day you may remember this choice.”

“I shall never regret it,” she answered, proudly.

“I hope from my heart that you may not, but I shall long regret it. For I believe that you have a noble nature, to which you are doing violence. And I hoped that in the life to which I would have taken you, that nobler nature would have conquered the one which finds so much attraction in mercenary things.”

The nobler nature of which he spoke struggled a

little to assert itself, but was overborne by the lower and stronger nature — by anger, disappointment, and wounded pride. What! she, who had expected to sway and dominate all with whom she came in contact, to yield to this man — to give up the strongest wish, the most earnest resolve of her life? From her early youth embittered by adversity and galled by poverty, she had said to herself, “Some day I will be rich!” And now the opportunity to possess riches, and with riches the power for which she longed, was placed within her reach, and yet was held back by the selfish obstinacy of a man, who made his refusal worse by condemning her wishes. At this moment she felt that anything was more possible than to yield to him.

“You are wasting words,” she observed, coldly. “My attraction for mercenary things concerns you no longer. Our folly is at an end. It *was* folly I see, for you have no trust in me, nor any inclination to please me; and where these things do not exist, love does not exist either.”

She gave him no opportunity to reply had he intended to do so, for she left the room abruptly with the last words.

And there was no deliberation about her next step. She went at once to Mr. Singleton. “I have come to tell you that your confidence in my power over your nephew is misplaced,” she said. “I have failed entirely to influence him. He is going away.”

The old man, who was leaning back in his deep velvet chair, his face against its soft richness, looking more than ever like a piece of fine ivory carving, did not appear very much surprised by this intelligence.

He remained for a minute without speaking, regarding intently the girl before him. Her beauty was truly imperial; for excitement gave it a brilliance — a light to her eyes, a color to her cheeks — which was almost dazzling.

“What a splendid creature!” he said to himself; then he remarked aloud, very quietly: —

“And you are going with him?”

“No,” she answered. “Since he has no regard for my wishes in a matter so important to me as well as to himself, I have declined to have anything further to do with him.”

“Good!” said Mr. Singleton. His tone expressed not only approval, but intense satisfaction. “I am glad that some way to punish him has been found. But what is he made of that he can look at you and refuse to do what you ask! Has he gone mad with obstinacy, or is he a man of ice?”

“I do not know,” she replied. “He cares only for himself and the gratification of his own whims, I suppose. He does not deserve that either you or I should think of him any more. And I,” she added, more sternly, “am determined that I will *not* think of him again. He has gone out of my life forever. There only remains for me now to go out of this house, with the most grateful memory, dear Mr. Singleton, of your kindness.”

“No,” said Mr. Singleton. He extended his hand and laid it on her arm, as if he would detain her by force. “It is not for you to go, but for him. And he shall go at once.”

“Not on my account,” she said, haughtily. “*He* has a right here, I have none.”

"You have the right that I ask you to stay," observed Mr. Singleton. "He has no other than my invitation, and that will be withdrawn as soon as I see him. Like yourself, I am done with him now forever. I have borne much from him and hoped much from him; but I see that the first was useless, and the last without any rational ground. This offense—his conduct to you—I will never forgive. But I hope, my dear, that you will suffer me to make what atonement for it I can. I consider you as much my adopted daughter as if this marriage on which I set my heart had taken place."

"You are very good," replied Marion. A vision passed before her as she spoke of all that this might mean; but she felt strangely dead toward it, as if already the fortune she coveted had been robbed of half its lustre.

"Stay with me, then," said Mr. Singleton. "I can not part with you, if Brian can. I want your society while I live, and I will provide for you liberally when I die. Will you stay?—is that agreed upon?"

"Yes," she answered. "If you care for me I will stay. Nobody else does care."

Then suddenly her proud composure gave way. She burst into tears, and made her escape from the room.

Perhaps those tears hardened Mr. Singleton's resolve, or perhaps it needed no hardening. After a few minutes he rang his bell, and sent the servant who answered it to summon Brian Earle to him.

The latter was on the point of leaving the house when he received the message, but he immediately obeyed it, saying to himself as he laid down his hat,

“As well now as later.” For he knew perfectly what was before him; and Mr. Singleton’s icy manner was no surprise to him when he entered the room where Marion had brought her story so short a time before.

“I am informed by Miss Lynde,” said Mr. Singleton, severely, “that your engagement to her is at an end, for the reason that you refuse to yield your wishes to hers as well as to mine, and she very wisely declines to countenance your folly and selfishness by sacrificing her life to it. Is this true?”

“Perfectly true,” replied the young man, calmly. “Miss Lynde thinks me not worth accepting without your fortune. I regret to say that this, to my mind, betrays a nature so mercenary that I am not sorry a conclusive test should have arisen, and ended an arrangement which certainly would not be for the happiness of either of us.”

“That is how it appears to you, is it?” said Mr. Singleton. “Well, let me tell you that, to me, your conduct is so utterly without reason or excuse, so shameful in its selfish disregard of everyone’s wishes but your own, that I finally cast off all regard for you. Go your way, study the art to which you have sacrificed not only me but the woman to whom you pledged your faith; but remember that you have lost your last chance with me. Not a sixpence of my money will ever go to you.”

“I have never wanted it,” said Brian, proudly.

“No,” answered his uncle. “But in the days to come, when your need for money increases, and you find that fame and fortune are not so easily won as you imagine now, you *will* want it; you will curse your folly then when it is too late; and you will think, per-

haps, of the old man who offered you so much for so little, and to whom you refused that little.”

Angry as the speaker was, something in the tone of his last words almost shook Brian's resolution. For a moment he asked himself if, after all, he might not be the victim of a self-willed delusion; if his uncle might not be right, and if it might not be his duty to yield. But this was only for a moment. He had the faculty of seeing clearly and deciding firmly once for all. He had long before this weighed every aspect of a question which so importantly concerned his life, and his final decision was based on many strong grounds. Those grounds he saw no reason to reconsider now.

“I am very sorry,” he said, gravely, “for all that has happened,—most sorry for any disappointment or pain I have caused you or another. But there are many reasons why I cannot comply with your wishes; and, since further discussion of the subject is useless, I will beg your permission to leave you.”

“Leave me and leave my house!” said Mr. Singleton, emphatically. “It is my duty to guard Miss Lynde from any possible annoyance, and to meet you could only be an annoyance to her now. You will, therefore, be good enough to go at once.”

“I will do so,” replied Brian, rising. “God bless you, sir, and believe that I am very grateful for all your kindness to me. I wish that I could have repaid you better.”

Then, before his uncle could answer, he went away.

CHAPTER XX.

BRIAN EARLE had not been gone more than two or three weeks when the report suddenly spread through Scarborough that Mr. Singleton was very ill. And for once report was true. One among the many chronic maladies from which he suffered took a turn for the worse, and the doctors shook their heads, saying the case was very critical.

Indeed it was more than critical. Those about the sick man knew that his recovery — even his partial recovery — was impossible. Close to him now was the dread Presence which care and skill had kept at bay so long, and no one was more thoroughly aware of the fact than himself. He met it with a grim philosophy, which is the only possible substitute for Christian resignation. Of religious belief he had very little, never having troubled himself to formulate the vague ideas which he had received from a much attenuated Protestantism. But, such as they were, they did not inspire him with terror. God would, no doubt, be merciful to a man who was conscious of never having done anything dishonorable in his life. This consciousness helped to support his philosophy, but it is not likely that he gave it much thought. A subject which has not occupied a place of importance in a

man's consideration during life will hardly do so even in the face of death.

Mr. Singleton was more interested in arranging his worldly affairs than in preparing for the great change from time to eternity. His lawyer was summoned, and a final and complete revision made of the important document which would fulfill or blast the hopes of many people. Concerning this document Mrs. Singleton was wild with curiosity; but she could learn nothing, and her husband declined even to speculate concerning their chances. "We shall know soon enough—perhaps too soon," he said, with his usual philosophy, a little tinged by despondency.

Another person who felt some curiosity, mingled with an indifference which surprised herself, was Marion Lynde. Who would take in the will that place which Brian Earle had forfeited? And what would the latter think now of the fact that he had thrown away a fortune rather than give a promise, the fulfillment of which, as it now chanced, would never have been exacted? "He would have had the money and his freedom besides," she thought. "Does he recognize his folly now? Will he recognize it when he hears the news that soon must be told him?"

Of her own interest in this crisis, Marion did not take a great deal of thought. She had no doubt that some legacy for herself would find a place in Mr. Singleton's will, and no doubt also that in the time to come she would be grateful for it. But she regarded the probability just now with a dull indifference, which was the reaction from a great disappointment. She had not only lost the only man who had ever touched her heart, but also the fortune that might have been

hers in the entirety. And, after that great loss, could she rejoice over the prospect of obtaining a small share of this fortune?

No: to rejoice was impossible; but she felt that whatever the old man's generosity gave would be welcome, since it would mean emancipation from absolute dependence on relations for whom she had no cordiality of feeling. No doubt the time would come when she would be very glad of this, but just now it was difficult — in fact, impossible — to be glad of anything.

In this way the days, weighted with much pain for one and much uncertainty of hope and fear for others, dragged their slow hours away and the end came at last. Marion was still in the house — Mrs. Singleton, who felt that her presence could no longer do any harm, had begged her not to leave,— and she felt a thrill of awe and regret when the words came from the sick chamber, “He is dying.”

So the old man who had showed nothing but kindness to her was passing away — and how? Without a single heart near him that throbbed with affection, without a Sacrament or a word of prayer! Marion had associated too much with Catholics not to feel the horror of this, but she also knew too much of Protestants to expect anything different. Yet she could not help saying to Mrs. Singleton, “Has no clergyman been sent for?”

That lady looked surprised. “No,” she answered. “Why should one be sent for? No one would take the liberty of doing such a thing while Mr. Singleton was conscious, and after unconsciousness had set in where would be the good? Mr. Eustace would come

and read prayers. no doubt, if we asked him to do so ; but what would be gained by it? ”

“ Nothing, I suppose,” said Marion. She had heard those prayers — which are all that Protestantism offers,—and shuddered at the recollection. Yet for the dying man to go forth into eternity without a word of appeal in his behalf, seemed to her so terrible that she stole away to her own room, opened a prayer-book which had been given her at the convent, and, kneeling down, said for the first time in her life the prayers for the dying which she found therein.

And while she was saying them — those tender and infinitely touching petitions, which call upon the Most High in solemn supplication for the soul in its agony,— the soul for which she prayed passed away, and was done with the things of earth forever.

A day or two followed, of that strange, hushed quietness, yet of much coming and going,— of the sense of a suspension of ordinary life, which prevails in a house where Death has for the time taken possession. The living are generally impatient of this time, and shorten it as far as possible, especially where no deep sense of real grief is felt. But Mr. Singleton, in death as in life, was too important a person for every due propriety not to be observed. There were arrangements to be made, friends to be summoned, and details of funeral and burial to be settled. These things required time ; and when it was finally settled that the funeral would take place in Scarborough, but the body would be carried for burial to the home of the dead man, there was a sense of relief in the minds of all concerned.

Marion accompanied Mrs. Singleton to the funeral

in the Episcopal church, which had so much pleased her taste on her first arrival in Scarborough. It was as pretty as ever; but how little correct architecture, stained glass or rich organ tones could give life to the mockery of death which is called a burial-service, and which contains no reference to the individual dead person whose body lies — one wonders why — before a so-called “altar,” where no sacrifice is offered, from which no blessing is given! Even the glorious promises of St. Paul, which the preacher reads with studied effect, fall upon the ear like something infinitely distant; the heart instinctively longs for one word of personal application, one cry for mercy and pardon on behalf of the poor soul that, in mute helplessness, can no longer cry for itself. But one listens in vain. There is not even an allusion to that soul. The general hope of immortality — which can be applied in any way that suits the listener — having been set forth, a hymn is sung, and, save for a few formal prayers at the grave, all is over.

Perhaps it was because she had so little religious sentiment to supply for herself what was lacking that, as Marion listened, she felt her heart grow sick with pity and disgust. “What is the possible good of this!” she exclaimed mentally, with indignation. “If no prayer is to be said for the soul, no blessing given to the body, why is it brought here? What meaning is there in such empty formalism? It is a mockery, nothing less; and if one cannot have what the Catholics give, I, like the materialists, who are the only logical Protestants, would have nothing.”

After the service, which impressed at least one observer in this manner, the body was at once taken

away. Mr. Singleton, of course, accompanied it, but his wife remained behind; and it was understood that immediately on his return the will would be read.

Eagerness on this score no doubt kept Mr. Singleton from the delay with regard to his return in which he might else have indulged, being a man who had a constitutional objection to haste. But for once he accomplished a very quick journey. On the third day after the funeral he returned, and the will was opened by the lawyer who had drawn it up according to the dead man's last instructions.

There was a strain of intense curiosity and anxiety regarding this will in the minds of all concerned. It was by this time generally known that, toward the last, Brian Earle had fallen hopelessly out of his uncle's favor; but no one felt able to conjecture with any certainty who would take his place in the will, although every one cherished a secret hope that it might be himself. There were several of these would-be heirs—cousins more or less removed—of the dead man; but Tom Singleton was, in the absence of Earle, the nearest relative, being the son of a half-brother, while Earle was the son of Mr. Singleton's only sister. The former, with all his easy-going quietness, felt that it would be an outrage if he were not the heir; although, knowing his uncle better than any one else, he knew also that he should not be surprised by whatever grim caprice the will revealed.

And such a caprice it did reveal, to the amazement and rage of everyone concerned. Mr. Singleton remembered with a legacy everyone whom it was proper that he should remember—the largest of these legacies being fifty thousand dollars to Tom Single-

ton, — and then he bequeathed the remainder of his fortune to his “adopted daughter,” Marion Lynde.

The disappointed heirs looked at one another with expressions that baffle description. What! half a million to a girl who had no claim upon it whatever, whose relationship to the old man was of the most vague and distant description! They could hardly believe that he had really been guilty of anything so infamous. They would have felt it less an injury if he had endowed a college or a hospital.

But one reflection seemed to occur to all; for, after the expressive pause which said more than any words, almost every voice spoke simultaneously, “The will won’t stand! His mind was weak when he made it. It’s evidently a case of undue influence.”

The lawyer shook his head. “No, gentlemen,” he said; “don’t make a mistake. This will can not be broken. My client took care of that, and I took care also. As for his mind being weak, Mr. Singleton here knows that up to the day of his death his mind was as clear and vigorous as it ever had been.”

Tom Singleton, thus directly appealed to, bent his head. He had not been one of the speakers, and, but for the fact that he had grown very pale, showed little sign of emotion.

“And, foreseeing of course that this disposition of his fortune would cause disappointment,” the lawyer went on, “Mr. Singleton was careful to explain to me why he selected Miss Lynde for his heir. It seems that she was for a time engaged to Mr. Brian Earle, whose name occupied in a preceding will exactly the place which hers does here. The engagement was broken in a manner which caused Mr. Singleton to

blame his nephew exceedingly, and the young lady not at all. So, as he told me, he determined that she should lose nothing. The fortune which would have been hers had she married Earle—should be hers in any event. This was what he intended; and your disappointment, gentlemen, may be less if you will remember that Mr. Brian Earle is the only person whom this bequest to Miss Lynde deprives of anything.”

But, naturally, this was not much comfort to the disappointed heirs. Each one felt that *he* should by right have taken Brian Earle’s place, and that a broken engagement hardly gave Marion Lynde a claim to the fortune which had been bequeathed to her. There were many more angry murmurs, and numerous threats of contesting the will; but the smile with which the lawyer heard these was not very encouraging, nor yet his calm assurance that they could find no better means of throwing away the money which had been left to them.

Finally they all dispersed, and Tom Singleton slowly took his way to the house, where his wife and the fortunate heiress were awaiting him. Never had he been called upon before to perform a duty from which he shrank so greatly. He dreaded the violence of his wife’s disappointment, and he felt a repugnance to the task of informing Miss Lynde of her inheritance. The lawyer had asked him to do so, and as one of the executors of the will he could not refuse; but it was a task which did not please him. If this girl, this stranger, had not come into their lives, would not he be in Earle’s vacated place? He could not but feel that it was most probable.

It would require a volume to do justice to the feel-

ings which Mrs. Singleton expressed when she heard the terrible news. She had not only lost the fortune — *that* might have been borne,— but it had gone to Marion Lynde, the girl whom she had discovered and brought to the notice of the infatuated old man who was dead! This was the insupportable sting, and its effect was all that her husband had feared. He had prepared himself for the storm, however; and he bore its outburst with what philosophy he could until Mrs. Singleton declared her intention of going to upbraid Marion with her great iniquity. Here he firmly interposed.

“You will do nothing of the kind,” he said. “Miss Lynde is not to blame at all, and you will only make yourself ridiculous by charging her with offenses of which she is not guilty. If she has schemed for this, she concealed the scheming so successfully that it is too late now to attempt to prove it. There is nothing to be done but to make the best of a bad matter, and bear ourselves with dignity. I beg that you will not see her until you feel able to do this. As for me, I must see her at once.”

And, in spite of his wife’s protest, he did so. When a servant came to Marion with the announcement that Mr. Singleton desired to see her in the drawing-room, she went down without any thrill of excitement whatever. It was as she had imagined, then: the old man had left her a legacy. This was what she said to herself. And vaguely, half-formed in her mind, were the words, “Perhaps ten thousand dollars.” She had never dreamed of more than this, and would not have thought of so much had not Mr. Singleton been of a princely habit of giving.

Was it wonderful, then, that the shock of hearing what she had inherited stunned her for a time? She could only gaze at the speaker with eyes dilated by an amazement that proved her innocence of any schemes for or expectations of this end. "Mr. Singleton," she gasped, "it is impossible! There must be some great mistake."

Mr. Singleton faintly smiled. "There is no room for mistake, Miss Lynde," he said. "My uncle has left his fortune to you."

CHAPTER XXI.

IT was at first almost impossible for Marion to realize that the desire of her life was gratified in a manner so strange and so unexpected. She seemed to be existing in a dream, which would presently dissolve away after the manner of all dreams, and leave her in her old state of poverty and lounging. That Brian Earle had lost his fortune, and that the old man now dead had not cared sufficiently for any of his other heirs to leave it to them,—that this fortune was hers — hers absolutely and alone,— was something that struck her as too wonderful, and, in a certain sense, too awful, to be true. There flashed across her mind a recollection of “being crushed beneath the weight of a granted prayer.” Was she to be crushed beneath the weight of this prayer of hers so singularly granted?

Certainly she felt herself in an isolation which was chilling to the heart. The man she loved was gone — had parted from her in contempt; and she felt sharply how much that contempt would be increased when he heard that she possessed his inheritance. As for friends, where would she turn to find them? For her uncle and his family she had never cared; Helen was estranged — if not in heart, at least in fact; for inter-

course between them could not now be pleasant to either; and it seemed a desecration of the name of friend to apply the term to Mrs. Singleton. Yet it was to Mrs. Singleton, after all, that she had to turn for social support and countenance at this crisis of her fortunes. And it was the good sense and philosophy of Mr. Singleton which induced his wife to see that she would gain nothing by following her declared intention of having nothing more to do with the heiress.

“People will only think that you are disappointed and envious,” he said; “and since the world never, under any circumstances, turns its back on a rising sun, you will merely put yourself in a foolish and awkward position. The thing to do is, as I have said before, to make the best of a bad matter. And for us it might be a great deal worse. Of course we have missed the fortune, but I don’t really think we ever had a chance of it; and we are not paupers, you know. Now, it will be a graceful thing for you to take up this girl. She will appreciate it, I think, and it will prevent any undesirable gossip about her or about us.”

“All that may be very true, Tom,” Mrs. Singleton replied. “But I do not see how I *can* force myself to have anything more to do with her. I so despise her duplicity!”

“Duplicity is a thing to be despised,” observed Mr. Singleton, quietly; “but I am not sure that Miss Lynde has been guilty of it. Let us give her the benefit of a doubt. If, as you believe, she schemed for this result, she most certainly did not expect it. I never saw any one show greater surprise than she did when she heard the news.”

“She is a consummate actress. She might have affected that.”

“Not even the most consummate actress could have affected what she exhibited. Her surprise amounted to incredulity. But, whether you believe this or not, believe that it will be best for you not to throw her off. There is nothing to be gained by that, and there may be a good deal to lose.”

This view of the matter, together with her husband’s unusual seriousness, impressed Mrs. Singleton so much that she finally consented to form an alliance, for purposes of mutual convenience, with Marion. The latter received her overtures with a certain sense of gratitude. She knew that they were interested, but she also knew that without Mrs. Singleton she would be placed in a very difficult position — would, in fact, appear in the eyes of the world as an adventuress who had secured a fortune at the expense of the rightful heirs. The countenance of those heirs was, therefore, very essential to her.

But this hollow compact for mutual convenience — how different was it from associations in which affection or sympathy forms the tie! Marion had fancied herself made in a mould strong enough to disregard such feelings, but she now found her mistake. Her heart ached for the affections she had lost — for Brian’s strong love, and Helen’s gentle tenderness. She had sacrificed both, and by sacrificing them won the fortune for which she had longed; but already she began to realize that she had lost in the exchange more than she had gained. Already the shining gold which had dazzled her was transforming itself into the dry and withered leaves of the fairy legend.

Her plans were formed to leave Scarborough. The associations of the place were hateful to her, and it was decided that she should go with Mrs. Singleton to the home of the latter, and then form arrangements for her mode of life. But, since she was still a minor, these plans were subjected to her uncle's modifications, and his consent was necessary for them. This caused a delay which detained her in Scarborough for some time, and brought to her knowledge a fact which was destined to influence her future.

This was the fact that Rathborne in his threat of enmity had uttered no idle words. A few days after the contents of the will had become known, while public interest respecting it was at its height, he met Tom Singleton and said a few significant words:—

“So Miss Lynde has won the fortune from you all! That is rather hard, isn't it?”

Mr. Singleton shrugged his shoulders. “Everyone knew that my uncle was a man of caprices. His will was certain to be a surprise, in one way or another; and for myself, I have no right to complain. He remembered me handsomely.”

“And is there no intention of contesting the will on the part of the heirs?”

“I hardly think so. Brian Earle and myself are the people most nearly concerned, and we do not think of it.”

“You are sure about Earle?”

“Perfectly sure,” said Mr. Singleton. “Why should a man go into a lawsuit to gain what he might have had for a word?”

“There might be several reasons,” returned Rathborne. “I can imagine one of great strength. But

if you do not think of contesting the will, another heir may come forward to do it."

"No other heir would have a chance. If the will were set aside, Earle and myself would inherit."

"Not if the man's son should chance to be living."

Singleton opened his eyes. "But the son is dead," he replied.

"Is he?" said Rathborne, dryly. "Who knows it?—who can prove it? But, of course, I spoke only of a probability."

He moved away then, while his companion looked after him with rather a blank and puzzled expression. "Now, what on earth can be known about it?" he thought. "And what does he mean? Of course there never has been any proof of George's death, that I know of; and if he *should* be living—Miss Lynde might look out for storms then. But nothing could be more improbable. My uncle evidently did not think it a matter to be even considered. *He* must have had some certainty about it."

Nevertheless, he mentioned to his wife what Rathborne had said, and she with malicious intent repeated it to Marion. "It is the first suggestion that has been made about George," she observed. "But if he should chance to be living, I am afraid you would lose everything."

"How could that be," said the young girl, "when he is not mentioned in the will?"

"Because, of course, he would contest it on the ground that his father believed him dead when he made it, and also that a man has no right to disinherit his son in favor of a stranger. I hope it may never

come to such a contest, for many disagreeable things would be said about you."

"It would certainly never come to it, as far as I am concerned," replied Marion, haughtily. "For if Mr. George Singleton appeared, I should yield his inheritance to him without any contest at all."

"Would you indeed?" asked Mrs. Singleton. She looked at her for a moment with her head on one side, as if contemplating the possibility of what it might mean for herself. "I don't think there is the least danger that he will appear," she said presently; "and I had really rather you had it than he. I always detested George."

"Thanks for the implied compliment," said Marion, smiling faintly.

She said no more on the subject, but, naturally enough, she thought much. It was a new and startling suggestion, and seemed to derive added force from the fact that Rathborne had made it. For she had never lost the sense of his hostile influence — of the realization that she had made an enemy of one who had the strength as well as the will to be dangerous. And now she felt sure that if George Singleton were on the earth this man would find him. "That is what he intends to do," she said to herself; "and this is his way of letting me know it — of making me understand that I hold my fortune on an uncertain tenure. Well, let him do his worst. If I lose the fortune, nothing will be left me at all; and that, no doubt, is what I deserve."

This was a new conclusion for Marion, and showed how far she had already traveled on the road of self-knowledge. Even now she began to ask herself what

there was which the money she had so eagerly desired could purchase for her of enduring interest? Now that everything was within her reach, she felt that she hardly cared to stretch out her hands to grasp any object of which she had dreamed. Admiration, pleasure, power,—all seemed to her like the toys which a sick child regards with eyes of indifference. Was it the wakening of her heart or the rousing of her soul which made them seem of so small account? She did not ask herself; she only felt that Brian Earle's influence had for a time lifted her into a region where she had breathed a higher air, and gained a knowledge of ideals which made her own now seem false, petty and unsatisfying.

Would these ideals have attracted Marion had they been presented by another person? That is difficult to say. Her nature had in it much essential nobleness—Earle had been right in thinking it more warped than really wrong,—and it might have responded in some degree to any influence of the kind. But surely it is not without grave reason that we are bidden to keep the heart with all diligence, since “out of it are the issues of life.” It had been necessary that Marion's heart should be roused out of its cold indifference to all affection, before she could grasp the meaning of the higher things of life—those things which have their root and their end in eternity.

It was one evening about this time that she chanced to be driving late through the streets of Scarborough, and saw the Catholic church open and several persons entering. A sudden impulse made her bid the coachman stop. She was alone, having just left Mrs. Singleton at the house of a friend; and she felt that

before leaving Scarborough finally — as it was her intention to do in a few days — she would like to enter once more the sanctuary where she had felt herself drawn very near to God. Since then the world had rushed in and overwhelmed her, and she had no longer any intention of embracing the true faith. But an attraction which could not be resisted drew her just now within the threshold of the door to which Earle had last led her.

She descended from her carriage, to the astonishment of a few loiterers around the church gate, and in the rich twilight walked up the path which led to the door. Music came from within, and as she pushed it open a vision of celestial yet familiar brightness burst on her. The altar was a mass of lights and flowers, and in the midst rose the ostensorium on its golden throne. The priest, with his attendants, knelt motionless before it, while from the organ-loft came the strains of the "*O Salutaris Hostia.*" Marion had been at the convent too long not to know all that it meant. She knelt at once, as a Catholic might have done; and indeed in her mind at that moment there was no sense of doubt. From the uplifted Presence on the altar faith seemed suddenly infused into her soul. Not only did all thought of questioning leave her, but all memory of ever having questioned. She knelt like a child, simply, humbly, involuntarily; and, with the same confidence as those around her, breathed a petition for the things of which she had begun to feel herself in need — for light on a path which was by no means clear, and for some better guide than her own erring will.

After Benediction she was one of the first to leave

the church, with a sense of peace which astonished her. "Why do I feel differently now from what I did when I entered?" she said to herself as she drove home in the soft dusk. "What power has touched me, and given me the first repose of spirit that I have known in a long time? It is surely strange, and impossible not to believe."

But there it ended. Not yet had come the time when she would feel the necessity of taking some practical step toward making this all-powerful help her own; not yet had the proud spirit bent itself to acknowledging its own inability to order its life. The very reason which not long before had drawn her toward the Church — the fact that Earle belonged to it — now repelled as strongly as it had attracted. The hour had not yet struck when such earthly considerations would fall away before the urgent demand of the soul, the need of the weak and the human for the strong and the eternal.

"The cedars must fall round us ere we see the light behind;" and not all of Marion's cedars had fallen yet.

The next day a surprise, which was yet not altogether a surprise, awaited her. She was quietly sitting in the room which had been Mr. Singleton's — that small, pretty apartment behind the large drawing-room, which still seemed full of the suggestion of his presence, — when she heard a visitor ushered into the adjoining room, and a minute later a servant appeared bringing her a card. She took it and read the name of Paul Rathborne.

It was a shock rather than an astonishment. She said to herself that she had looked for this: she had

known that he would come as the bearer of ill news, if ill news were to be brought to her. For a moment she remained silent looking at the bit of pasteboard which said so much. Should she refuse to see him, should she deny him the pleasure of triumphing over her, and force him to send through another channel whatever news he brought? She was strongly tempted to this, but pride in the first place — the pride of not wishing to let him imagine that he had any power to move her — rejected the idea; and in the second place she felt that she must know at once whatever he had to tell. If she refused to see him, he would be capable of making her suffer suspense for an indefinite length of time. Steadying her voice to quiet indifference, therefore, she said to the servant: “Show Mr. Rathborne in here.”

A minute later the curtains between the two rooms were drawn back, and Rathborne entered. She rose and bowed slightly, looking more princess-like than ever in her beauty and stateliness, and in the midst of the luxury which surrounded her. No detail of her appearance or her manner was lost upon the man who had come with his heart full of bitterness toward her. And if an additional touch to this bitterness had been needed, her haughtiness, and her air of calmly possessing a place where she belonged, would have given it. The recollection of some words of his was fresh in the minds of both as they looked at each other. “I promise you that in the hour when your schemes are nearest success, you will find them defeated by me.” These had been his last words to her. Was he come now to tell her that they were fulfilled? This was the thought in

her mind, but there was no sign of it in her manner or her glance. She stood, composedly waiting for him to explain the object of his visit; and it was he who had to speak first.

“I have ventured to ask the honor of this interview, Miss Lynde,” he said — and, under its outward respect, she keenly felt the mockery of his tone,— “in order to make a communication of importance to you. It is true, I might have made it to your lawyer, but I thought it best that I should be myself the bearer of such news to you.”

“I fully appreciate your motives,” she replied, in her clear, flute-like tones. “Pray spare yourself and me any apologies, and let me know what possible news of importance can have fallen to you to bring me.”

As she understood the underlying mockery in his voice, so he heard and felt the scorn of hers. Her clear, brilliant glance said to him: “I know that you have come here because you hope to humble me, but I shall only show you how despicable I consider you.” It stung him as she had always had the faculty of stinging him, and roused his determination to make his tidings as bitter to her as possible.

“The news which I bring you,” he said, “is most important to your interest, since it is the intelligence that I am directed to bring suit at once to set aside Mr. Singleton’s will made in your favor, in order that the estate may devolve to the natural heir.”

“Indeed!” she said, quietly, with admirable self-control. “And may I beg to know who is the natural heir who proposes to enter into this contest?”

“An heir against whose claim you will find it impossible to fight,” he answered, with a ring of

triumph in his voice ; — “ one who has been supposed to be dead, but who has been roused, by the news that his inheritance has been alienated from him, to prove that he is living. In other words, my client is Mr. Singleton’s only son, George Singleton.”

CHAPTER XXII.

IT does not always follow that a thing is not a shock because one has in a manner expected it. Marion suffered a severe shock when she found her worst anticipations realized; for, although she had in a degree anticipated it, knowing that Rathborne was not likely to have spoken without some ground when he alluded to such a possibility, there had still been the contrary assurance that Mr. Singleton had evidently believed in his son's death, since there was not even an allusion to him in the will. The intelligence just conveyed was, therefore, a hard blow mercilessly struck; but she preserved her self-possession, notwithstanding, in a remarkable manner.

"This is a very extraordinary piece of news," she said. "I have been under the impression that Mr. George Singleton was dead."

Rathborne smiled. "Most people have been under that impression, especially those who had very good reason for desiring that it should be so," he answered. "But, so far from being dead, he has been living in South America, and prospering fairly."

"Living in South America, and yet he has already heard of his father's death and the disposition of his father's property!—how has that happened?"

Despite himself, Paul Rathborne colored slightly, but his glance met hers fully as he answered, "It has not happened by chance. Some time ago a friend of mine who had been in South America mentioned meeting a man there who, from his description, I felt sure must be Mr. Singleton's missing son. The matter was then no interest or concern of mine; for it was to be supposed that the father and son knew their own affairs best. So I paid no attention to it. But a short time ago it began to occur to me that it was rather hard that, while the son was still living, strangers should be fighting for his inheritance. Therefore I wrote to my friend (who had returned to South America) to let Singleton know the state of affairs here. The latter immediately wrote to me, saying that he would return to his father as soon as possible, and meanwhile asking me to inform Mr. Singleton of his (the son's) existence and well-being. This letter reached me just at the time of Mr. Singleton's death. I immediately communicated this fact to Mr. George Singleton, as also the facts with regard to the estate; and I have just heard from him, authorizing me to contest the will at once."

There was a brief pause, during which Marion asked herself what was her best course of action; and out of the confusion into which her mind was thrown, she could grasp only one clear idea — that she must be careful how she committed herself to this man, who had come with the desire to injure and triumph over her. Consequently, when she spoke it was to say, quite calmly: —

"I think that you have made a mistake in coming to me with this story instead of going to my lawyer.

I understand very well *why* you have come ; but now that you have accomplished the end you had in view, I beg to refer you to him. For, of course, in a matter so important as this I shall not think of acting without advice."

"I am acquainted with your prudence," he said, with the mockery of his tone somewhat more pronounced ; "and am not, therefore, surprised to find you so cautious. But I think it only right to warn you that your caution will avail very little. No will which ignores a son in favor of an absolute stranger can possibly stand."

"That is a point which I do not care to discuss with you," she replied. "But you will allow me to inquire if Mr. Singleton is in this country or on his way here?"

"Not yet. He will come if it is necessary ; but I am at present authorized to act for him."

"You seem to have inspired him with a remarkable degree of confidence, considering that you are an entire stranger to him."

It was merely a chance shot, but something in the expression of Rathborne's face gave her an idea like a flash of lightning.

"It is to be supposed," she went on before he could speak, "that you are convinced of the identity of this stranger with Mr. Singleton's son?"

"Do you imagine that if I were not —"

"I imagine nothing," she interposed ; "and as a lawyer you can not need a reminder from me that it will be necessary for this person whom you represent, fully to prove his identity with the son whom Mr. Singleton believed to be dead."

It was perfectly true, and Rathborne knew it; but he was none the less astonished that she should have so clearly and immediately perceived it.

“I always knew that she was shrewd as the devil,” he said to himself, while he observed aloud:—

“Do not flatter yourself with any hope that it is an impostor who is about to claim the fortune you have inherited. Nothing can be more certain than that it is Mr. Singleton himself. To attempt to deny his identity will only be to make yourself ridiculous, and to damage your cause more than the plain facts have damaged it already. Your lawyer, I am sure, will advise you better.”

“Let me again refer you to that lawyer, if this is all you have to say to me,” she answered, rising from her seat.

He rose also; and as they stood for a moment face to face, it proved impossible for him to restrain some words which rose to his lips, brought there in double bitterness by the sight of her proud, calm countenance.

“I shall go to your lawyer,” he said, “and I shall not rest until my client has all his rights—the rights of which he would not have heard for many a day but for me. When he is in full possession of them, I will ask you to be good enough to remember a pledge that I gave you once, and which I shall then have fully redeemed. I always endeavor to pay my debts; and, as you are well aware, I owe you a very heavy debt at present. I hope to repay it very soon—with interest.”

“I am well aware that you are a malicious and a dishonorable man,” she replied, calmly. “Because your treachery with regard to Helen recoiled on your-

self, you have determined to injure me. Do your worst. Nothing that you could do would make you more despicable in my eyes than you are at present. This is all that need be said between us. Will you go now, or shall I be forced to leave you?"

"I shall go at once," he answered; "but you will permit me to offer you a little parting advice. Enjoy as much as possible the fortune which you hold now, for your possession of it will be very short."

With this last sting he went out from her presence; and she, sinking into Mr. Singleton's deep chair, clasped her hands over her painfully-beating heart, and looked with troubled eyes over the soft landscape before her, of which she hardly perceived a feature.

And so she was, after all, to lose the fortune for which she had sacrificed everything else! It had by no means brought her the satisfaction or happiness she had imagined, but it was all that remained to her — the one good which she still grasped out of the wreck she had already made of her life, and her life's best hopes. To lose it now, to sink back again into poverty and dependence after one brief taste of power and independence, that would be a bitter retribution for the choice she had made when she sent Brian Earle away, — a bitter retribution for the selfish vanity which had made Rathborne her enemy. She shuddered a little at the recollection of that enmity. Bravely as she had borne herself before him, it was a dismaying thought that such a power and such a will to injure menaced her. She thought of her proud self-confidence when from the quiet convent she had stepped into the world: her belief in her own ability to mould life, events, and people to her wishes. And now with what

absolute failure she was threatened! — with what complete and hopeless loss of all that she desired!

The next day her lawyer came with a grave face, and greeted her with an air which was not lost upon her. "He thinks that it is all over with me!" she said to herself; but, though her heart sank a little lower at this proof of the weakness of her cause, she smiled on him brightly and bravely enough.

"I suppose," she began, "that you have seen Mr. Rathborne, who was so kind as to pay me a visit yesterday in order to give me some interesting intelligence?"

"Yes, I have seen Mr. Rathborne," he answered; "and the news he brought me was very unexpected and very serious."

"What do you think of it?" she asked.

The lawyer looked at her with surprise. The coolness of her tone and the composure of her manner seemed to indicate that she by no means appreciated the gravity of the danger which threatened her.

"I think," he replied, "that such a contest will be ruinous to you. No court will be likely to sustain a will which entirely disinherits a man's own son. Candidly, my advice to you is to compromise at once."

Marion did not say, "Advice should be asked before it is offered," but her curling lip said so for her, and so did the manner in which she ignored his suggestion.

"Before taking up a contest over the will," she said, "would it not be well to be quite sure that the person who proposes to contest it is indeed Mr. Singleton's son?"

Again the lawyer stared at her. Was it possible that he had not thought of this?

“Of course,” he replied, “that is most essential; but it is very easily done. Mr. George Singleton has but to show himself. There are numbers of people who will recognize him.”

“Why does he not show himself, then? Why is he content with merely writing to Mr. Rathborne instead of coming to look after his inheritance himself?”

“Because it is all that is essential at present — to give us warning and take the necessary legal steps. He will, of course, appear later.”

“Let us demand that he appear at once,” she said, with a decision of tone and manner which more than astonished the lawyer. “I, for one, distrust Mr. Rathborne utterly, and refuse most positively to transact any business with him. If you can get the address of this reputed Mr. Singleton, I beg that you will write to him, and say that we decline to recognize his claim in any manner whatever until he shows himself and establishes his identity. Then there will be time enough to talk of contest or compromise. Am I not right in this?”

“Perfectly right,” responded the stupefied man of business. Never (as he afterward affirmed) had he been so surprised as by these energetic instructions. He had come himself prepared to instruct; to find perhaps unreasoning opposition, or hysterical complaining, which it would be necessary to quiet and bring to some practical view of the case. But to be met instead with this cool self-possession, these clear ideas and precise directions, was little less than a shock to him. His own ideas seemed to desert him as he sat and stared at the beautiful, resolved face which confronted him.

“Certainly you are right,” he said again, after a moment. “The identity of the claimant is the first thing to be established; but — I confess that I am a little surprised by your thinking of this point. Why should it occur to you to doubt whether the person claiming to be Mr. George Singleton is really himself?”

“Because,” she answered, “in the first place I am sure (and you, no doubt, are sure also) that his father believed him dead, else certainly he would not have omitted his name entirely from his will. And he must have had some reason for this belief. Again, as I have already told you, I distrust Mr. Rathborne entirely. He would be perfectly capable of bringing forth a false claimant.”

“My dear young lady, that is a very serious, a very shocking charge. Mr. Rathborne is a — well, a sharp practitioner, perhaps; but I have no reason to suspect that he would be guilty of a criminal act. Indeed I have every reason to believe that he would *not*.”

“Your knowledge of Mr. Rathborne differs from mine, then,” said Marion, coldly. “I am certain that he would be guilty of any act which would serve his purposes. And he has a motive for this which renders distrust necessary. Therefore, I insist upon the appearance of Mr. Singleton and the establishment of his identity before I will take any step whatever toward noticing his claim.”

“It is only a measure of precaution,” said the lawyer, “and very well thought of. You have an uncommonly clear head for business for a young lady. I will, then, write at once to George Singleton; but I do not advise you to build any hope on the probability of

his proving a false claimant. This conduct is altogether characteristic of him ; and I, for one, had always a suspicion that he was not dead.'

"His father, however, must have had reason for believing him so."

"Perhaps — and perhaps not. Mr. Singleton was a man of the strongest passions, and his son had outraged him in every particular. When, after a long course of disregarding and defying his father's wishes, the young man left home with the avowed intention of never returning, I know that Mr. Singleton declared that he should be as one dead to him. He only kept his word when he made his will."

"But do you not think that in such a case as that he would have mentioned him, if only to declare that he disinherited him for good cause?"

"It was not necessary, and he might not have desired to do so. He was a singular man and a very reticent one. Even I, who knew him so long and so well, have no idea whether he had any knowledge of his son's fate or not. And this fact makes me believe that it is more than likely that George Singleton is alive and ready to claim his inheritance."

"Let him come and do it, then," said Marion. "That is all."

And in this decision she was sustained by those who as well as herself were interested in upholding the will. Mr. Tom Singleton shook his head, and agreed with the lawyer that such a course of conduct was very characteristic of George Singleton ; but he also declared that it would be folly to run any risk of playing into the hands of a false claimant. "And when a man has disappeared for ten or fifteen years from the

sight and knowledge of everyone who knew him, there is reason to fear that, with a fortune at stake, he might be personated by some one else," he said. "Such things have happened time and again. You are quite right to insist that he shall show himself. If he is George Singleton I shall know him in half a minute, and then we can decide what to do."

"It will prove to be George Singleton, I am sure," said his wife. "He was always a malicious wretch, don't you know? And this is just like him. But the puzzle to me is, how did he find out how things were in so short a time?"

"He had a self-constituted informant here," said Marion. "Mr. Rathborne took pains to discover his whereabouts, and to let him know the news of his father's death and the contents of his father's will, as soon as possible."

"Mr. Rathborne — oh, I understand!" said the lady. "Dear me, how many malicious people there are in the world! And this is how he revenges himself for your little flirtation with him, and for the loss of your cousin's fortune! Well, my dear, I must say that you are likely to pay heavily for what could not have been a *very* great amusement."

Hot tears of mortification suddenly gathered in Marion's eyes. Surely this was humiliation, to see her conduct as it looked in the eyes of this shallow woman, and to be pitied (conscious that in the pity there was a strain of exultation) for the downfall that awaited her from Rathborne's revenge. If Helen knew, she might hold herself well avenged; but, then, in Helen's gentle soul there was no room for any revengeful sentiment.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IT was soon apparent that no one except Marion herself had any doubt but that George Singleton was alive, and that it was himself and no impostor, who was claiming his inheritance. "The whole thing is so exactly like him!" said Mrs. Singleton. "If it were not malicious, it would not be characteristic of George. He wants to give as much trouble and disappoint as many people as possible."

"He must possess an amiable and attractive character," said Marion, faintly smiling. But as she smiled she said to herself that it was very evident the arrangement she had entered into with Mrs. Singleton could not stand. If the latter believed that it was only a question of time till Mr. Singleton's son should appear, what further need was there for her to conciliate and endure the girl who would soon have no power to return her good offices? Instinctively Marion knew that she was asking herself this question, and that it was best it should be answered at once.

"I have been thinking," she observed, aloud, "that since there seems so much doubt about the result of this matter, it will not be well for me to make any change in my life at present. Our arrangements had better be deferred indefinitely; and meanwhile I will stay here until Mr. Singleton arrives."

Although Mrs. Singleton possessed considerable power of self-control, she could not prevent her face from showing the relief she felt at these words.

“ I suppose it will really be best,” she said. “ It would be very awkward for us, as well as for you, if we took up your cause, and, as it were, identified ourselves with it, and then — ”

“ And then I relapsed back into my original insignificance,” said Marion. “ Yes, I perceive. And, believe me, I have no desire to sail for a time under false colors, or receive any attention which would be paid only to Mr. Singleton’s heiress. Moreover, if the business ends as you evidently expect, I should have no power to return the obligation under which you would have placed me. We will, therefore, say no more about our plans, and I will quietly remain here.”

“ But you can not remain alone, and I *must* get back home — ”

“ Do not let me detain you a day,” said Marion, haughtily. “ I am not rich in friends, but I can find some one to stay with me, so long as I need a companion ; and it is only a question of money.”

“ Oh ! yes, mere companions can be found in sufficient number — people who will be delighted to come. But you ought to have some social protection, some proper chaperon — ”

“ If all were settled as we thought, that would be necessary,” Marion interposed ; “ but since I may, very likely, soon be deprived of the consequence that Mr. Singleton’s money gives me, and since social protection and proper chaperonage are altogether superfluous for a girl without fortune, I need not trouble myself about them in this short interval of waiting.”

Mrs. Singleton said no more, but she confided to her husband her opinion that Marion had given up all hope of being able to retain the fortune. "And it has made her dreadfully bitter," she added. "You know she always had a very cynical way of talking for such a young girl, but now that is more pronounced than ever. Disappointment is going very hard with her. I am almost sorry for her, although, of course, she has no right to the money at all."

"She has the right that its owner chose to give it to her," said philosophical Mr. Singleton.

But, although Marion put a bold front on the matter to Mrs. Singleton, her heart really sank at the desolateness of her position. So long as the fortune was still hers, she could buy a companion, as she could buy anything else; but she saw in the eyes of everyone around her the settled conviction that the fortune would be no longer hers. And then?

Meantime, however, it was necessary to make some arrangement, since Mrs. Singleton was eager to be gone; and, turning over in her mind the list of her few acquaintances in Scarborough — for friends she had none, — Marion was asking herself rather blankly to which one she could appeal for advice and assistance in her dilemma, when a servant entered with the announcement that a lady desired to see her.

"A lady!" she repeated. "Who is she? Did she give no name or card?"

The servant replied that the lady had given neither, but that, in his opinion, she was a genuine visitor — not an agent for patent soap or anything else of the kind.

"I suppose I had better see her," said Marion,

reluctantly; "but she can not be a person of any importance, or she would have sent her name."

She went down stairs, slowly, indifferently, with a sense of mental lassitude altogether new to her, entered the drawing-room, and found herself face to face with Helen. She uttered a cry as the sweet, affectionate face she knew so well turned toward her, and the next moment they were in each other's arms.

"O Marion! I am so glad that you are glad to see me!" were Helen's first words. "I was afraid that you might not be."

"Afraid that I might not be glad to see *you!*" said Marion. "How could that be?—what reason could I have? But, O Helen, dear Helen! how good it is of you to be glad to see *me!*"

"I know no reason why I should not be," replied Helen. "But I feared that there might be some disagreeable recollection—something to make you shrink from seeing me; so I thought I would spare you the shrinking—I would let you have the shock at once. But it is no shock, after all. The moment I saw your eyes, I knew you were glad."

"Oh! my dear, how kind you are!" cried Marion. "Glad! What should I be made of if I were not glad to see you—the most generous heart in all the world! But when did you come back to Scarborough?"

"Last night; and I would not write or let you know, because I wanted to see you myself, without any warning. And so, Marion, your great desire is accomplished—you have become rich since I went away!"

"And am on the point of becoming poor again,"

said Marion, with a smile. "Have you not heard that?"

"No: I have heard nothing—but how can that be?—how can you become poor again, unless you lose Mr. Singleton's fortune?"

"That is just what is going to occur—at least everyone thinks so. It is said that Mr. Singleton's son is alive, and that if he chooses to contest the will, it can not stand."

"O Marion! how sorry I am!"—the eloquent eyes said so indeed.—"To think that you should have obtained what you wanted so much, only to lose it at once! That is worse than if you had never possessed it."

"And do you see no retribution in it, Helen?" asked Marion, very gravely. "Did not you, too, want something very much—the happiness that had been promised you all your life,—and did you not lose it through my fault? Believe me, I have thought of this; and, thinking of it, I can make no complaint."

"I am sorry," said Helen, while a shade fell over her face, "that you should speak again of *that*. I do not look at it quite as you do. Happiness ought not to be our end in life.—I am not very wise, but I know that, because I have faith to tell me so. No doubt I thought of it too much; but even when I felt most about losing it, I was sure that God must know best, and I did not really desire anything which was not according to His will. How could one be so foolish as to do that? For it certainly would not be happiness if it did not have God's blessing on it."

"O Helen! Helen!" exclaimed Marion. It was a cry of mingled wonder and self-scorn. Somehow the

simple words touched her more than the most eloquent appeal of any preacher could have done. For it was Helen who spoke, — Helen, who had just learned her wisdom in the hard school of practical experience, and who spoke thus to the person against whom her heart might have been most bitter. “My dear,” she went on after a minute, “you are so good that you make me ashamed. I have learned lately — yes, even I — what you lost, and how much you must have suffered in the loss. It was through my own fault and by my own choice that I lost my happiness; but you were blameless as an angel, and yet you talk like an angel about it — ”

“No, no,” said Helen, quickly; “only like the most ordinary Catholic. And that not without a struggle, Marion. Don’t fancy me better than I am.”

“I don’t fancy: I know you to be like something angelic compared to me,” returned Marion, with a sigh. “Do you think that I ever asked myself anything about the will of God? I never even thought of Him in connection with my desires.”

“O Marion!”

“It is true. Don’t expect me to say anything else; for, with all my faults, I was never a hypocrite, you know. I thought nothing of Him, I asked nothing of Him, and now I have nothing to fall back upon. My happiness, like yours, is gone — with the difference that *I* was not worthy of it, whereas you were saved from a man who was not worthy of *you*. And now the money for which I was ready to do anything and sacrifice anything is in jeopardy, and no doubt will soon be gone.”

“Has it brought you satisfaction since you have had it, Marion?”

“Do not ask me!” she said, sharply. “What is there in the world that does bring satisfaction? But when I give it up, I shall have nothing, absolutely nothing, left.”

“You will have God’s providence,” answered Helen, gently. “Trust a little to that; and tell me something — all if you will — about yourself, — about what has happened since we parted, and what your plans for the future are.”

In past time, though Marion had always loved Helen, she had rather despised her as a counselor; but now she felt it a relief beyond the power of words to express, to open her heart, to tell her difficulties, even to ask advice from one of whose affection and interest she was so secure. For had she not lately learned how weary life can be when it holds not a single friend, not one heart on which it is possible to rely for disinterested aid or counsel? She told the story of her brief engagement to Brian Earle, and did not resent the condemnation which she read in Helen’s eyes. Then a harder task was before her — to speak of Rathborne’s part in the appearance of George Singleton. She touched on this as lightly as possible, but Helen quickly seized the fact.

“And so it was Paul who found him!” she said. “I am sorry for that, — sorry, I mean, that he should have taken such a part in what did not concern him, from the motive which I fear actuated him.”

“He took pains to leave me in no doubt whatever about his motive,” observed Marion. “I have seen him only once, and then I bade him do his worst —

produce his client without loss of time. When he is produced, if he is properly identified, my dream of riches will be over; for I shall give up the estate without a contest. But I will not give it up until I am certain that I shall not be resigning it to a false claimant."

"You do not think that Paul Rathborne would be guilty of fraud?" said Helen quickly, in a pained tone; for the loyal heart was slow to resign any one for whom it had ever cherished an affection or a trust.

"You forget," said Marion, waiving the question whether or not she believed Rathborne capable of fraud, "that this man is in South America, and no one here has seen him. Mr. Rathborne has only communicated with him by letters. Now, what would be easier than for some unscrupulous man to write in George Singleton's name, if the latter were dead? Such things are of common occurrence. But it would be difficult to personate him so as to deceive the many people who have known him; and that is why I will take no step, nor even consider the matter, until *he has been produced.*"

"I suppose that is best," answered Helen. "And meanwhile what are you going to do?"

"I am going to stay here, with what patience I may. How I am to live alone, I do not exactly see — for Mrs. Singleton is going away; but now that I have you again, I have taken heart. You will recommend some one to stay with me."

"I will do better than that: I will take you home with me."

"Oh, no!" said Marion, shrinking a little; "that

can not be. It is like you, dear Helen, to propose it; but I do not think my aunt would like — stop! I know she would be kind, and try not to show what she felt; but I should be aware of it — aware that she has no respect for me in her heart, and I should be more ill at ease there than here. This is my home for the present; it may not be so long, and I may never have another. So let me keep it while I may. Find me some good, quiet woman — you know everyone in Scarborough — to stay with me; and come yourself whenever you can, and I shall be content.”

“There will be no difficulty in finding such a person as you want,” said Helen. “But I think my plan is best.”

Marion shook her head. “No,” she insisted. “I abused your hospitality once. I can never forget that; and I do not think that, kind and good as she is, my aunt will ever forget it; so do not let us talk of my going to you. Some day, perhaps, if I have no other refuge in the world, I may come and ask you for a shelter, but not now.”

She was immovable in this, even when Mrs. Dalton seconded Helen’s invitation; and so they did what she asked — found a pleasant, quiet, elderly lady to stay with her; and let her have her own way.

It was a strange time, the period of waiting which followed — a kind of interlude, a breathing space, as it were, between the rush of events which had reached this conclusion, and other events which were to follow and change life yet again, in what degree no one could say. It seemed to Marion that she could hardly be said to live during these weeks. She merely existed — in a state partly of expectation,

partly of that lassitude which follows a high degree of mental as well as physical tension. She had passed rapidly through many experiences, many intense emotions; and now, menaced by others of which she could not see the end, she suddenly sank down to rest, like a soldier on the field of battle.

She had but two sources of pleasure during this time: one was Helen's companionship, which she had never before valued or appreciated; the other, the services of the Catholic church. The plain little chapel, which had at first repelled her, began to seem to her like a true home of the soul; religious influences sank more and more deeply into her heart; and dimly, as new ideas shape and present themselves, there began to dawn on her the meaning of Helen's simple words. "It certainly would not be happiness if it did not have God's blessing on it," Helen had said. Was it because no blessing of God had been on *her* happiness that, in every form, it had so quickly eluded her grasp? She asked herself this question, and when a soul has once asked it the answer is not long in coming. But whether or not it will be heeded when it comes, is too often a matter of doubt. Impressions pass quickly, the sway of the world is hard to break, and who can tell how far the poor soul may be swept into storm and darkness before it is brought safe into port at last?

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE period of waiting ended very abruptly one day. It was by this time soft, Indian-summer weather; and Marion was seated in the garden with Helen one afternoon, mellow sunshine and brilliant masses of flowers all around them, when a servant appeared with the intelligence that Mr. Singleton was in the house and wished to see her.

“Mr. Singleton!” she repeated, a little startled. “What Mr. Singleton?”

“Mr. Tom, ma’am,” repeated the servant, who had been accustomed to distinguish him in this manner during the life of the elder Mr. Singleton.

“Oh!” she said. And then she turned to Helen with a faint smile. “I don’t know whether I am relieved or disappointed,” she observed. “I thought it was the other.”

“But the other would hardly be likely to come without warning — and alone,” returned Helen.

“That is very true. But I wonder what this Mr. Singleton can want — if he has any news?”

“You can only find out by going to see,” said Helen.

“Yes,” assented Marion. She rose as she spoke, and made a few steps toward the house, then paused

and looked back like one who is taking a farewell. "The crisis must be at hand," she said. "I feel as if I were on the verge of a great change. When I see you again, Helen, I may be dispossessed of all my riches."

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Helen, in a matter-of-fact way. "How can you be dispossessed in so short a time?"

The other laughed. "'If 'twere done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly,'" she said, and so went on toward the house.

Mr. Singleton, who was awaiting her in the drawing-room, came forward and shook hands very cordially. They had always been good friends, and he had a very kind feeling toward the beautiful and comparatively friendless girl. This kindness had now an emphasis, which she perceived, together with something of compassion. She looked at him and smiled.

"Has the true heir appeared?" she asked; "and have you come to warn me to prepare for abdication?"

"How shrewd you are!" he said. But, in truth, he was much relieved that she was shrewd enough to divine the object of his visit,—a visit which it had required a considerable effort on his part to undertake. "The true heir—if you consider him so—*has* appeared; but there is no question of abdication for you. He will be very glad if you consent to compromise, and so save him a contest over the will."

She sat down in a chair conveniently near, looking a little pale. Notwithstanding her question, she had not really anticipated such positive assurance at once; and recognizing this, Mr. Singleton regretted having been so abrupt.

“ I thought you expected it,” he said; “ but I see that you were not quite prepared. I am sorry — ”

She put up her hand with a gesture which stopped his words. “ There is nothing for which to be sorry,” she said. “ Of course I expected it, but perhaps not so immediately or so positively. But I don’t mean to be foolish: I intend to be quite cool and business-like. Mr. George Singleton has arrived, then. Have *you* recognized him? ”

“ Perfectly. He has changed very little, considering all things, and there can be no question of his identity.”

“ Are the other members of the family, and friends of the family, as positive as yourself? ”

“ Yes: no one has a doubt but that it is George. In fact, no one could have a doubt who had ever known him. He was twenty years old when he went away, and of a very marked personal appearance. The change of sixteen years is by no means so great as might be imagined. Appearance, manner, habits — all prove that he is George himself. Indeed I must be quite frank and tell you that there is not even a peg on which to hang a doubt of his identity.”

She looked at him for a moment in silence, her brow drawn together by the earnestness with which she seemed trying to read his face. At length she said, slowly: “ I must trust your opinion; I have no one else to trust. And I do not think you would deceive me.”

“ I certainly would not,” he answered, gravely. “ Why should I? Putting honor aside, I have nothing to gain by espousing George Singleton’s cause. As a matter of fact, I do not espouse it at all. I merely come to you as a friend, and tell you that he is cer-

tainly the man he claims to be. And, under these circumstances, I think your best plan will be to compromise with him as speedily as possible."

"Of that there is no question in my mind," she said, with her old air of pride. "If I could, I would not retain the fortune of a man whose son is living. Tell Mr. George Singleton that I will turn over his father's estate to him as soon as may be."

"But that," said Mr. Singleton, with energy, "can not be allowed. As one of the executors of the will, I should protest against it. Whether my uncle believed in the death of his son or not, we can not know, neither can we know how he would have acted if he had certainly been aware of his existence. All that we have to deal with is the simple fact that he left his fortune to you without even mentioning his son's name; and this being so, it is not demanded of you — it is neither just nor right — that you should turn it all over to him."

"But he is the natural and rightful heir to it, and no one shall ever say of me that I grasped or held what rightfully belonged to another."

"My dear young lady, you said a moment ago that you intended to be quite cool and business-like in discussing this matter. Allow me, then, to put it before you in its business-like aspect. You are at the present time the lawful possessor of my uncle's fortune by his direct bequest, and unless the courts set aside his will you must remain so. The issue of an attempt to set aside the will is, of course, uncertain; and the contest would be long, troublesome and costly to all concerned. Recognizing these facts, George Singleton says that he is willing to agree on a liberal basis

of compromise. And, since my uncle certainly wished you to have *all* his fortune why should you refuse to retain a part of it?"

"I have already told you, because in justice it belongs to his son; and why should I keep a part any more than the whole of what is not justly mine?"

Mr Singleton had an air of saying to himself, "Heaven grant me patience!" but, possessing a good deal of that quality, he said aloud: "How in the name of common-sense can that be held to belong to George Singleton which has been given to you? Honestly, if you divide with him it is as much as you can be expected to do."

"It is something I should despise myself for doing," she said, with a sudden flush of color in her face. "You are very kind, Mr. Singleton, and I really believe that you are considering my interest in this matter. But you forget the position I occupy — that of an interloper who has come in to take a fortune away from its natural heirs, and who, no doubt, is held to have schemed to that end. *You* know better than that, I am sure; but the world does not know better, and Mr. George Singleton does not know better. Now, I shall be glad to prove that, although I value wealth and desire wealth — why should I deny it? — I would not acquire it at the cost of my self-respect. Since you say Mr. Singleton's son is certainly living, I do not feel that I have any right to keep his fortune any longer than I can put it out of my hands. Pray be good enough to tell him so."

"My dear Miss Lynde, I can not agree to tell him anything of the kind. You must positively take time for consideration and advice."

She shook her head. "I do not need time, and I shall certainly not seek advice. I have already made up my mind what to do. Can you imagine that I have not considered this in the weeks that I have been waiting? If you decline to give my message to Mr. Singleton, I shall have to communicate with him directly myself."

"It would be best that you should communicate with him directly, if you could by that means be brought to look at the matter in a reasonable light, and see that there is no possible cause why it should not be arranged on the basis of a liberal compromise. Half a million is surely enough to divide."

She put out her hands, as if to push the proposal from her. "I will not hear of it," she said. "I will not seem to grasp money which is not mine. Do not argue the point further, Mr. Singleton. I appreciate your kindness, but I can not yield."

"Well," he said reluctantly, "I am sorry for it. Believe me you are making a great mistake, and one which, in the nature of things, you must regret as time goes on. We are not young and impulsive forever, and some day you will say, 'I had a right to my share of that fortune, and I was wrong to give it up.'"

"It may be," she answered; "but I can not keep it now—I can not! Where is Mr. George Singleton?—where can I address him, if you will not take my message to him? It is impossible for me to address him through his lawyer."

"He will have no use for a lawyer if you persevere in your intention," said Mr. Singleton, shrugging his shoulders. "As for his address, he is here in Scar-

borough, and quite ready to wait upon you at your convenience, if you will receive him."

She started. This was coming a little closer than she anticipated. And yet, she asked herself, why not? "'Twere well it were done quickly," and it seemed likely now to be done quickly enough. After a moment she said, steadily: "There is no reason why I should not receive him whenever he likes to come, since you assure me that he is really the man he claims to be."

"Of that there can be no doubt."

"Then let him come—the sooner the better. But do not let him bring Mr. Rathborne with him. That person I cannot receive."

"I will come with him myself," said Mr. Singleton. "I should not have thought of doing otherwise."

She held out her hand to him with a grateful gesture. "You are very good to me—very kind," she said. "I shall never forget it."

"I wish you would let me be of some use to you, by taking my advice," he answered.

But when he went away it was with the reflection that women are surely obstinate creatures; and, however charming they may be, they are, as a rule, quite devoid of reason. Marion had proved immovable in her resolution, as also in her determination not to take advice on it. Once fully assured that the man purporting to be Mr. Singleton's son was really so, her mind was made up what to do. She went back into the garden like one moving in a dream, and told Helen the news.

"The fairy tale is over," she said; "my fairy fortune is about to slip away from me. Am I sorry?"

I think I am more apathetic just now than either glad or sorry. It has not brought me one day of happiness, but I know the world well enough to be aware that it is better to be rich and unhappy than poor and unhappy. Poverty aggravates every other evil; and yet I am not grieved to have the opportunity to prove that I am not so mercenary as — some people doubtless believe me. Brian Earle will not think that I have schemed for his inheritance when he learns that I have voluntarily given it up to his cousin.”

Helen looked up with a keenness of perception which was rather unusual in her soft eyes. “I think,” she said, “that *that* is the consideration which moves you chiefly. But is it altogether a right consideration? Mr. Earle does not injure you by believing what is untrue of you, but you will injure yourself by giving up everything, and surely you are not bound to do so. If Mr. Singleton had not desired you to have part at least of his fortune, he would never have left you all of it.”

“One would think you had heard the arguments of the gentleman who has just gone away,” said Marion, smiling. “Dear Helen, don’t make me go over it all again. I fear that it is more pride than conscience which makes me feel that I must resign the fortune. But I can never recover my own self-respect until I have done so. And my own self-respect is not another name for the respect of Brian Earle. If I were conscious of being right I might not care that he thought ill of me; but my own judgment echoes his. I have been willing to barter everything of value in life for money, and now it is right enough that the money should be taken from me. I feel as

if by giving it up altogether I might recover, not what I have lost — I do not dream of that, — but the right to hope for some form of happiness again.”

Helen gravely shook her head. “You talk like a pagan,” she said. “All this sounds like propitiating gods, and sacrificing to fate, and things of that kind. The fact is, you are trusting entirely to your own judgment in the matter, and that is strange; for there seems to me a point of conscience involved. Either you have a right to a part of this fortune, or you have not. If you have, why should you give it away to a man who does not ask it and does not need it? While if you have not a right, there would be no more to be said about it; you would have the consciousness of some firm ground under your feet, and no reason hereafter for regret.”

“Helen, you astonish me!” said Marion, who certainly looked astonished at this unexpected view of the case. “How on earth did you contrive to get at the kernel of the thing in that manner?”

“Why, there is nothing surprising in that,” remarked Helen. “It is the way any Catholic would look at it. Things like that never trouble us. There is always a plain right or a plain wrong.”

“And where do you find the law or rule by means of which to tell what is right and what is wrong?”

“There is no difficulty in that,” was the reply. “We have certain very clear rules given us, and if there is any difficulty in their application we know where to go to have the difficulty solved.”

“To a priest, I suppose?”

“Yes, to a priest. You can not think that strange if you remember that the priest is trained in the most

special and careful manner, as well as enlightened by God, in order to enable him to deal with such difficulties."

There was silence for a minute or two, while Marion, leaning back in her chair, looked up at the deep-blue sky, and some golden boughs that crossed it. Presently she said, in a meditative tone: —

"There do not seem to be any difficulties to speak of in this case, but I should not mind putting it before some one altogether outside of it, and without any interest in it. Still, I could not go to a priest, because I am no Catholic."

"You are more of a Catholic than anything else," said Helen. "You know that. And I think if you went to Father Byrne, and put the abstract question to him, he would tell you what is right."

"You forget that I have no right to go to him. It would be presumption on my part. Why should I, who do not belong to his people, trouble him with my personal affairs?"

Helen smiled. "You don't know Father Byrne," she answered. "He is always glad to serve any one. I know that, even as a friend, he would gladly advise you. I will ask him, if you consent."

"Ask him what?"

"To see you and tell you what he thinks."

"Helen, you should not tempt me to make myself a nuisance. Besides, Father Byrne does not like me, and that renders me more reluctant to trouble him."

"What has put such an absurd idea into your head? Why should he not like you?"

"Why? Ah! who can answer such questions? But really in this case there is an easy answer. He thinks

me an objectionable sort of girl; I used to see it in his face when we met at your mother's house. He would look at me sometimes with a mild but quite decided disapproval when I had been saying something particularly frivolous or satirical; and I did not blame him in the least. How could he approve of me? *You* are the type of girl that he approves, and he is quite right."

"Marion, I wish you would not say such things."

"But they are true things. And, then, of course he knows the story of how your engagement ended, and very likely thinks me worse than I am in regard to that. Then I am worldly to the tips of my fingers; I have inherited a fortune to which I have no right, and — well, there is no good in going on. These are quite sufficient reasons why Father Byrne does not like me, and why I should not trouble him."

"All this is absolute nonsense; and I will prove that it is, if you do not positively object. I will go to him and ask him to see you, and you will find how quickly he will say yes."

Marion laughed a little — a laugh without any merriment, only a kind of sad self-scorn. "Upon my word," she said, "I am in so weak a frame of mind that a straw might influence me; and this being so, it is a comfort to trust to you, who will never lead any one wrong. Go to Father Byrne, if you will; but don't be surprised if he declines to have anything to do with me."

CHAPTER XXV.

IT was without the least fear of Father Byrne's declining to have anything to do with Marion that Helen went to him — and it was something of a shock to her to find that Marion had been right in her opinion, and that he very much disapproved of and distrusted that fascinating young lady. He looked troubled at her request, and put out his lip in a way he had when anything perplexed him.

“My dear child,” he said, hesitatingly, “I really don't see what I can do for your cousin. She is not a Catholic, she does not come to me for religious advice; and if she wants a worldly opinion, there are many people who could give it much better and with much more propriety than I.”

“She does not think so, Father, and neither do I. It is not merely a worldly opinion, though it regards worldly matters; but a point where conscience comes in, and she wants to know what is right.”

“But why come to me?” he asked. “Has she not her own spiritual guides?”

“Marion!” said Helen. She laughed a little. “I cannot fancy Marion regarding any Protestant as a spiritual guide; and since, as you say, she is not a Catholic, she has none at all. But I believe that her

becoming a Catholic is only a question of time, and therefore she will have confidence in your opinion."

Father Byrne put out his lip still farther and shook his head. "I do not know very much of the young lady," he replied; "but from what I do know I should say that her ever becoming a Catholic is more than doubtful."

"I am afraid that you are prejudiced against her, Father," said Helen.

"I think not," he answered, gravely. "Why should I be prejudiced against any one? But I should profit very little by my experience of the world if I did not learn to judge character from some manifestations. I do not wish to say anything severe of your cousin, my child, but she has not impressed me favorably."

"Poor Marion!" said Helen. "She is and always has been her own worst enemy. Nobody knows her as well as I do, Father — that is, nobody except Claire; — and know how much good there really is in her. All that is worse is on the surface; and she shows it so recklessly that people think there is nothing else. But I see a great change in her of late, and I think it would be well to encourage her in anything that draws her nearer to religious influences. Therefore, if it is not asking too much of you to see her and give her a little advice on this matter, which is so important to her, I should be very glad."

"Should you?" asked the good priest, smiling. "Well, to make you glad in such an unselfish way I would do a good deal. There is really no reason why I should not give Miss Lynde the counsel she asks, though it is rather curious that she should seek

it from me. You can bring her to me whenever it is convenient for you; and, if she does not object, I should wish you to be present at the interview."

"She will not object," answered Helen; "and it is very good of you to consent. I can bring her immediately, for I left her in the church while I came to you. There is need for haste, because to-morrow probably she will have to decide finally what she is to do."

"Bring her, then, at once," said Father Byrne, with an air of resignation. He felt, though he did not say, that his own people troubled him quite sufficiently with their personal affairs, without an outsider finding it expedient to throw upon him the very perplexing burden of decision in an affair which involved the interests of others. And Marion Lynde was the last person with whose affairs he would have wished to be concerned in the least degree. If any one beside Helen had come to him in her behalf, he would certainly have refused to do so; but it was impossible for him to refuse Helen. It was not only that he was attached to her, as, in one degree or another, every one who knew her was; but he was specially touched by her interest in and kindness to one who had certainly been the cause of much pain to her, if not of serious injury. "If she had not the most generous heart in the world, she would not vex herself about Miss Lynde's affairs," he said to himself; "but since she does, I should not mind helping her a little."

So it came to pass that Helen brought Marion from the church to the pastoral residence adjoining, where they found Father Byrne awaiting them in the plainly-furnished sitting-room, which had yet a picturesque,

monastic suggestion from the religious objects that were its only adornments, and its latticed windows opening on depths of verdure. The priest received them kindly; and then, with some inward nervousness, though outward composure, Marion opened her subject.

“I feel that I have no right at all to come to you, Father, and trouble you with my private matters; but perhaps your kindness will lead you to excuse me on the ground that there is no one else to whom I can go. I have not many friends, and among them there is not one person whose judgment in this case would not have an interested bias. Besides, I should like to know what is the moral view of it—the really right thing to do,—and you, if you will, can tell me that.”

“I can give you the view which would be presented to a Catholic,” said Father Byrne; “but you will not recognize anything binding in that.”

“I shall be bound by whatever you tell me is right,” she answered, simply. “I do not seek your advice without meaning to be guided by it, else there would be no excuse for coming to you. I beg you to speak as frankly as if you were addressing a Catholic.”

“Tell me, then,” he said, “exactly the point on which you are in doubt.”

She told him briefly, but with great clearness; and he listened attentively to all that she had to say before uttering a word. Then when she paused he replied, with the air of one who is accustomed to give prompt decisions:—

“From what you tell me I think there can be no question but that you are clearly entitled to retain a

part of the fortune. Since it was the desire of the testator that, under the circumstances of the supposed death of his son, you should have all of it, we must believe that even had he known his son to be living he would not have failed to leave you a legacy. It would be entirely just and right, therefore, that you should retain a part, while it is also right that you should resign the bulk of the estate to its natural heir."

Helen directed a triumphant glance toward Marion, which said, "You see how entirely Father Byrne is of my opinion!" but Marion did not perceive it. She was looking down with rather a disappointed air.

"I should prefer to give it all up," she said — "to keep nothing."

Father Byrne spread out his hands with a gesture very familiar to those who knew him well. "There is nothing to prevent that," he observed. "It would not be wrong; but, if you will permit me to say so, it would be foolish. Why should you wish to defeat entirely the kind intentions of the dead man in your behalf?"

"I can hardly explain," she answered, "without going into personal details, which would not interest you. About the manner in which I received this money, my conscience is clear enough; for I did nothing to induce Mr. Singleton to make such a will, and no one was more surprised by it than I. But — before that —" she hesitated, paused, then with an effort went on: "Everything might have been different if I had acted differently at an earlier period. I made a very deliberate and mercenary choice then. It led to this disposition of Mr. Singleton's fortune; and now I feel that there is retribution, punishment,

whatever you like to call it, in the circumstances that are taking it away from me. That makes me reluctant to keep any of it. I should feel as if I were still being paid for — what I lost. I express myself obscurely, but I hope that you understand me."

"Yes," he replied, "I think that I do. You feel as if this fortune had been bought at a certain price, and therefore it has lost value in your eyes. That is purely a matter of feeling, with which the abstract question involved has nothing to do — unless there is some point on which your conscience accuses you of wrong-doing."

She shook her head. "There is none directly touching the money. But, indirectly, the money was the root of everything — of a choice which has brought me no happiness."

"And you think, perhaps, that by resigning it you may recover what you have lost?"

She colored vividly. "No," she said quickly, almost indignantly. "I have no thought of the kind. That choice is made irrevocably. I can recover nothing but my own self-respect."

Father Byrne looked a little puzzled. "I fail to see," he said, "how your self-respect has been lost by having a fortune left you which you declare you did nothing to secure. But that is a question for yourself alone, since it is evidently a matter of feeling. The moral point I have answered to the best of my ability."

"You think that I ought to retain part of this fortune?"

"I cannot go so far as to say that you *ought*. There is no moral obligation binding you to do so, as far as I am aware of the circumstances. I can only

say that it is clearly right for you to do so — if you think fit.”

Evidently after this there was no more to be said; and Marion rose to take leave, saying a few words of sincere thanks for the kindness with which he had received her. “It has been very good of you to advise me,” she said, gratefully. “I shall never forget it.”

“I only hope that the advice may be of some use to you,” answered Father Byrne. “But it will be better if you ask God to guide and direct you.”

“Well, are you satisfied?” asked Helen, when they found themselves outside. “Have you decided what to do?”

“Not yet,” said Marion. “I have only been told what I may do, and I must take a little time to decide whether or not I will do it.”

“Then you have really gained nothing by going to Father Byrne,” Helen continued, in a disappointed tone.

“Oh, yes! I have gained a great deal,” the other said quickly. “I seem to feel myself standing on firm ground — to know just what I ought to do and what I ought not, what is permitted and what is not. The question still remains, however, whether or not to do what is permitted.”

“I can’t see that you have gained much,” replied Helen, with a sigh.

But Marion felt that she had gained much when she faced the question alone, as all important questions must at last be faced. She had been assured that there was no reason why she should not retain a part of the money which had come into her possession; and she said to herself that even Brian Earle — indeed

Brian Earle of all men — would recognize the authority of the voice which had so assured her. She need not hold herself grasping and mercenary if she did this — if she kept a little of the fortune that its possessor had given to her in its entirety. So much, therefore, was clear. But there could be no doubt that she would prefer to give it all up — to close forever the passage in her life which had been so bitter, and in the end so humiliating; to disprove by a magnificent act of generosity all the charges of scheming which she felt sure had been made against her, and to know that Brian Earle would learn that none of his uncle's money remained in her hands.

But if she gratified herself in this manner what was before her? Not only the old dependence, but a dependence which would be doubly embittered by the resentment with which her relatives were sure to regard the step which she thought of taking. "My uncle will never forgive me," she thought. "He will say that I had no right to throw away the means to help myself, and fall back on his already overburdened hands. That is true. It will be bitter as death to do so. And yet how can I keep this money? Oh, if I only had been spared the necessity of such a choice! If it was wrong to desire wealth so much, surely I am punished for it, since what it has brought on me is worse than the poverty from which I have escaped. That, at least, was simple; I had only to endure it. But this is fraught with serious consequences, that go beyond myself and touch other people. What shall I do — ah! what shall I do?"

She was walking up and down her chamber, all alone in the silence of the night. Suddenly, as she wrung

her hands with the silent force of her inward appeal, Father Byrne's last words recurred to her memory: "It will be better if you ask God to guide and direct you." She stopped short. Was there any hope that God would really do this if she ventured to ask Him? It proved how much of an unconscious pagan she was that such a question should have occurred to her. But the imperative need at this moment for some guidance, stronger even than that to which she had already appealed, seemed to answer the question. She sank on her knees and lifted her heart to Him who hears all petitions, begging, simply, earnestly, like a child, to be directed into the course right and best to pursue.

The next morning Marion's companion — a quiet, elderly widow — noticed that she was more than usually restless; that she settled to no occupation, but wandered from the house to the garden and back again; from room to room and window to window, as if in expectation of some event. Mrs. Winter was not a person easily "fidgeted:" she bore this for some time without remark, but at length she was driven to say, "You are looking for some one this morning?"

"Yes," answered Marion, promptly. "I am looking for two people, and I have very important business to settle when they come. That makes me a little restless. I wish it were over." Then she laughed a little. "It is not every day, however, that one has a chance to see a dead man," she said. "That should prove interesting."

Mrs. Winter looked startled. "A dead man!" she repeated. "How — what do you mean?"

"I mean," replied Marion, calmly, "that it is a

case of the dead alive. You have not heard, then? If you went out into Scarborough, I fancy you would hear very quickly. Mr. Singleton's son, who was supposed to be dead, has proved to be very much alive, and I am expecting a visit from him to-day."

"My dear Miss Lynde!" — the good woman fairly gasped — "what a piece of news! And how quietly you take it! Mr. Singleton's son alive! Good Heavens! In that case, who will have the property?"

"That is what we are going to settle," said Marion. "It strikes me that a son should inherit his father's estate; do you not think so?"

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Winter, more than ever confounded by this cool inquiry. "Usually — oh! yes, I suppose so," she added after a minute. "But in this case — the young man was so wild that his father cast him off, did he not?"

"I never heard the story clearly from any one who had authority to tell it," answered Marion. "I do not know what occurred between father and son, but I am quite sure that Mr. Singleton believed his son to be dead when he made the will in which he left me his fortune."

"Then, my dear, if I may ask, what do you mean to do?"

"What is right and honest," said Marion, with a faint smile. "Wish me courage, for there is the door-bell!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE first thing of which Marion was conscious when she entered the drawing-room was that a pair of bold, bright and keen dark eyes were instantly fastened on her. The owner of these eyes was a tall and very striking-looking man, whose originally brunette skin was so deeply bronzed by exposure to a tropical sun that he scarcely had the appearance of a white man at all; but whose clear-cut features at once recalled those of old Mr. Singleton, whose whole aspect was so unusual and so remarkably handsome that it would have been impossible for him either to personate or be mistaken for any one else. Marion recognized this even while Mr. Tom Singleton was in the act of stepping forward to take her hand, and said to herself that no one who had ever seen this man once could doubt whether or not he was the person he assumed to be.

“How do you do this morning, Miss Lynde?” said Mr. Singleton, who tried to conceal a certain awkwardness under more than his usual geniality of manner. “I hope we have not disturbed you too early, but I had your permission to present my cousin, Mr. George Singleton.

“Not my permission only, but my request.”

observed Marion, looking at the tall, handsome stranger, who bowed. "I am very glad to see Mr. George Singleton — at last."

"You are very good to say so," replied that gentleman, easily. "I assure you that, so far from expecting you to be glad to see me, I feel as apologetic as possible about my existence. Pray believe, Miss Lynde, that I mean to give you as little trouble as possible. I have no doubt we can soon arrive at an amicable arrangement."

"I have no doubt of it," said Marion, calmly. "But you will allow me to say how sorry I am that any arrangement should be necessary,—that your father was not aware of your existence when he made his will."

Mr. George Singleton shrugged his shoulders. "I am by no means certain that my father believed me to be dead," he answered. "At least he had no special reason for such a belief. He had indeed not heard from or of me in a long time, because that was thoroughly settled when we parted. I threw off his control, and he washed his hands of me. But I hardly thought he would ignore me completely in his will. No doubt he had a right to do so, for I had ignored every duty of a son; but he should have remembered that he also had something to answer for in our estrangement. However, that is neither here nor there. What I mean to say is that the consciousness of my shortcomings will make me easy to deal with; for I feel that my father was in great measure justified when he selected another heir."

This cool, careless frankness was so unexpected that for a moment Marion could only look at the

speaker with a sense of surprise. He was so totally unlike what she had imagined! His bold, bright glance met hers, and, as if divining her thoughts, he smiled.

“Don’t expect me to be like other people, Miss Lynde,” he continued. “Tom here will tell you that I never was. Even as a boy I was always a law unto myself — a wild creature whom nothing could tame or restrain. Perhaps it is because I am still something of a wild man that I see no reason why we should not discuss and settle this business between us in a friendly manner. I have only the most friendly sentiments for you, being aware that my coming to life is rather hard lines for you.”

Marion could not but respond to his smile and what seemed to be the genuine though somewhat blunt friendliness of his manner. Yet when she spoke her tone was slightly haughty.

“Pray do not think of me,” she said. “The fact that your father left his fortune to me was the greatest surprise of my life, — a surprise from which I have hardly yet recovered. Naturally, therefore, it will be no great hardship to give it up.”

“But I don’t ask you to give it up,” replied the tall, dark man, hastily. “There is enough to divide, and I assure you I am not a grasping fellow. Ask Tom if I am.”

Mr. Tom Singleton smiled. “If so,” he observed, “you must have changed very much.”

“I haven’t changed a particle. I did not give a thought to my father’s fortune when I left him: I was thinking only of freedom, of escape from irksome control. And I hardly gave it a thought during the years that I have been out yonder, thoroughly satis-

fied with my own mode of life. I should not be here now but for the fact that a lawyer — what is his name? — took the trouble to write and inform me that my father was dead and I disinherited. Naturally one does not like to be ignored in that way; so I replied, directing him to contest the will. But since I have come, heard the circumstances of the case, and — and seen you, Miss Lynde, I perceive no reason for any such contest. We'll settle the matter more simply, if you say so."

"Seen you Miss Lynde!" It sounded simple enough, but the eyes of this wild man, as he called himself, emphasized the statement so that Marion could not doubt that her beauty might again secure for her an easy victory — if she cared for it. But she did not suffer this consciousness to appear in her manner or her voice as she replied:—

"We can settle it very simply, I think. Shall we now put aside the preliminaries and proceed to business?"

"Immediately, if you desire," answered Mr. Singleton. He bent forward slightly, pulling his long, dark moustache with a muscular, sunburned hand, while his brilliant gaze never wavered from Marion's face. His cousin also looked at her, apprehensively as it seemed, and gave a nervous cough. She met his eyes for an instant and smiled gravely, then turned her glance back to the other man.

"I am very sure, Mr. Singleton," she said, "that your father must have left his fortune to me under a wrong impression of your death. If this were not so he certainly left it under a false impression of my character. To retain money of which the rightful heir is living, is something of which I could never be

guilty if every court of law in the land declared that the will should stand. Your father's fortune, then, is yours, and I will immediately take steps to resign all claim of mine upon it."

"But I have not asked you to resign more than a portion of it," answered Singleton, impetuously. "It is right enough that you should have half, since my father gave you the whole."

"You are very generous," she said, with a proud gentleness of tone; "but it is quite impossible for me to keep the half of your fortune. Your father would never have left it to me but for circumstances which need not be entered into — he wished to punish some one else. But he could never have wished to disinherit his son. I am certain of that. He liked me, however — I think I may say as much as that; he was very kind to me, and I believe that even if he had known of your existence he might have remembered me with a legacy; do you not think so?" She turned, as she uttered the last words, to Mr. Tom Singleton.

"I am sure of it," replied that gentleman.

"Believing this, I am willing to take what he would have been likely to give. It is rather difficult, of course, to conjecture what the exact amount would have been, but it seems to me that he would probably have left me about ten thousand dollars."

Both men uttered a sharp exclamation. "Absurd! You must certainly take more than that," said George Singleton.

"Remember that you are giving up half a million," remarked his cousin.

But Marion shook her head. "It is with extreme

reluctance," she said, "that I have decided to take anything. Mr. Singleton is aware that my intention yesterday was to keep nothing, but I have been advised to the contrary by one whose opinion I respect; and so I have determined to take what I think your father, under ordinary circumstances, might have given one with no claim upon him, but in whom he had taken an interest."

"But why should you fix upon such a paltry sum?" demanded George Singleton. "There was nothing niggardly about my father. He was cold and hard as an icicle, but he always gave like a prince."

"That would have been a very generous bequest to one who had touched his life as slightly as I had," remarked Marion, "and who had no claim upon him whatever —"

"He calls you his adopted daughter in his will."

"He was very good to me," she replied, simply, while tears came to her eyes. "But I think he only said that to make such a disposition of his fortune seem more reasonable. Your cousin here has perhaps told you, or at least he can tell you, all the circumstances — how your father was disappointed in some one else on whom he had set his heart."

"Brian Earle," said George Singleton, carelessly. "Yes, I know."

"Well, he thought that I had been disappointed too; and so — partly from a generous impulse to atone for the disappointment, and partly from a desire to punish one who had greatly angered him — he made *me* his heir. But it was all an accident, a caprice, if I may say so; and if he had lived longer he would have undone it, no doubt."

“You did not know my father if you think so,” said the son, quietly. “He had caprices perhaps, but they hardened into resolutions that never changed. Who should know that better than I? No, no, Miss Lynde, this will never do! I can not take a fortune from your hands without litigation or any difficulty whatever, and leave you only a paltry ten thousand dollars. It is simply impossible.”

“It is altogether impossible that I can retain any more,” answered Marion. “As I have already said, I would prefer to retain none at all; and if I consent to keep anything, it can only be such a moderate legacy as might have been left me.”

“As would *never* have been left you! My father was not a man to do things in that manner. What was your legacy, Tom?”

“Fifty thousand dollars,” replied Mr. Tom Singleton.

“Something like that I might agree to, Miss Lynde, if you will insist on the legacy view of the matter; but I should much prefer to simply divide the fortune.”

“You are certainly your father’s son in generosity, Mr. Singleton,” said Marion. “But believe me you are wasting words. My resolution is finally taken. I shall make over your fortune to you, retaining only ten thousand dollars for myself. That is settled.”

It was natural, however, that neither of the two men would accept this settlement of the case. Both declared it was manifestly unjust, and each exhausted his powers of argument and persuasion in trying to move Marion. It was a singular battle; a singular turn in an altogether singular affair;—and when at last they were forced to go without having altered her resolution, they looked at each other with a sense of

baffled defeat, which presently made George Singleton burst into a laugh.

“By Jove!” he said, “this is a reversal of the usual order of things. To think of a disinherited man, instead of having to fight for his rights, being forced to beg and pray that his supplanter will keep a fair share of the inheritance! What makes the girl so obstinate? Has she money besides?”

“I don’t believe that she has a sixpence,” replied his cousin.

“Then what on earth, in the name of all that is wonderful, is the meaning of it? She does not look like a fool.”

Mr. Singleton laughed. “Miss Lynde,” he said, “is about as far from being a fool as it is possible to imagine. We all thought her at first very shrewd and scheming, and there is no doubt but that she might have wound your father round her finger without any trouble at all. She is just the kind of a person he liked best: beautiful, clever — *he* never fancied fools, you know, — and she charmed him, without any apparent effort, from the first. But if she schemed for any share of his fortune it was in a very subtle way—”

“In the light of her conduct now, I don’t see how it is possible to believe that she ever schemed at all,” interposed the other.

“I *don’t* believe it,” said Tom Singleton; “although the fact remains that, in choosing between Brian and his uncle, she stood by the latter.”

“There might have been other than mercenary considerations for that. I can’t imagine that this splendid creature ever cared about marrying Brian.”

Mr. Singleton did not commit himself to an opinion

on that point. He said, diplomatically: "It is hard to tell what a woman does care to do in such a case, and Miss Lynde by no means wears her heart on her sleeve. Well, the long and short of the matter was that Brian obstinately went away, and that your father made this girl his heir — for the very reasons she has given, I have no doubt. She was most genuinely astonished when I told her the news, and my belief that she had ever schemed for such a result was shaken then. But from something she said to me yesterday I think she is afraid that such a belief lingers in people's minds, and she is determined to disprove it as completely as possible. Hence her quixotic conduct. I can explain it in no other way."

"She is a queer girl," observed George Singleton, meditatively; "and so handsome that I don't wonder she knocked over my father — who was always a worshiper of beauty, — and even that solemn prig, Mr. Brian Earle, without loss of time."

"She knocked over another man here in Scarborough, who has a hand in her affairs at present," said Mr. Singleton, significantly. "Did it ever occur to you to wonder why that fellow Rathborne should have interested himself to look you up and notify you of your lost inheritance?"

"Why should I wonder over anything so simple? Self-interest prompted him, of course. If there had been a contest over the will, he might have pocketed a considerable slice of the fortune."

"Well, I suppose that influenced him; but his chief reason was a desire to do Miss Lynde an ill turn, and so revenge himself for her having trifled with his feelings."

“You are sure of this?” asked George Singleton, with a quick look out of his dark, flashing eyes.

“Perfectly sure. Everyone in Scarborough knows the circumstances. He considered himself very badly used, I believe — chiefly because he was engaged to Miss Lynde’s cousin; and the latter, who is something of an heiress, broke the engagement. He fell between two stools, and has never forgiven her who was the cause of the fall.”

“The wretched cad!” said George Singleton, emphatically. “As if anything that a woman could do to a man would justify him in such cowardly retaliation! I am glad you told me this. I will end my association with him as soon as may be, and let him know at the same time my opinion of him — and of Miss Lynde.”

“Do be cautious, George. I shall be sorry I told you the story if you go out of your way to insult the man in consequence. No doubt he *was* badly used.”

The other laughed scornfully. “As if that would excuse him! But I don’t believe a word of it. That girl is too proud ever to have taken the trouble to use *him* badly. But a man might lose his head just by looking at her. What a beauty she is!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

AND now the question is — what am I to do?" It was Marion who asked herself this, after the departure of the lawyer, who, with some remonstrance, had taken her instructions for drawing up the necessary papers to transfer to George Singleton his father's fortune. It was not with regard to the act itself that the lawyer remonstrated — *that* he thought just and wise enough, — but with regard to the sum which the heiress of the whole announced her intention of retaining.

"You might just as well keep fifty or a hundred thousand dollars," he declared. "Mr. Singleton is willing to relinquish even so much as half of the fortune; and it is absolute folly — if you will excuse me — for you to throw away a comfortable independence, and retain only a sum which is paltry in comparison to the amount of the fortune, and to your needs of life."

"You must allow me to be the best judge of that," Marion replied, firmly.

And, as she held inflexibly to her resolution, the lawyer finally went away with the same baffled feeling that the Singleton cousins had experienced. "What fools women are when it comes to the practical concerns of life!" he said, from the depths of his masculine scorn.

“They are always in one extreme or the other. Here is this girl, who, from what I hear, must have been willing to do anything to secure the fortune, now throws it away for a whim without reason!”

Meanwhile Marion, left face to face, as it were, with her accomplished resolve, said to herself, “What am I to do now?”

It was certainly a necessary question. To remain where she was, living with the state of Mr. Singleton’s heiress, was impossible; to go to her uncle, who would be incensed against her on account of the step she had taken, was equally impossible; to stay with Helen, however much Helen in her kindness might desire it, was out of the question. Where, then, could she go?—where should she turn to find a friend?

Marion was pacing up and down the long drawing-room as she revolved these thoughts in her mind, when her attention was attracted by her own reflection in a mirror which hung at the end of the apartment. She paused and stood looking at it, while a faint, bitter smile gathered on her lip. Her beauty was as striking, as indisputable as ever; but what had it gained for her—this talisman by which she had confidently hoped to win from the world all that she desired? “I have been a fool!” she said, with sudden humility. “And now—what remains to me now?”

It almost seemed as if it was in answer to the question that a servant at this moment entered, bringing the morning mail. Marion turned over carelessly two or three papers and letters, and then suddenly felt a thrill of pleasure when she saw a foreign stamp and Claire’s familiar handwriting. She threw herself into a chair and opened the letter.

It was dated from Rome. "I am at last in the city of my dreams and of my heart," wrote Claire; "pleasantly settled in an apartment with my kind friend Mrs. Kerr, who knows Rome so well that she proves invaluable as a *cicerone*. Already I, too, feel familiar with this wonderful, this Eternal City; and its spell grows upon me day by day. Now that you have gained your fairy fortune, dear Marion, why should you not come and join me here? I have thought of it so much of late that it seems to me like an inspiration, and I can perceive no possible reason why you should not come. Pray do. It would make me so happy to see you, and I am sure you would enjoy many things which form part of our life here. Having lived abroad many years with her husband (who was an artist), Mrs. Kerr has a large cosmopolitan acquaintance, and her *salon* is constantly filled with pleasant and interesting people. Come,—Marion, come! I find every reason why you should, and none why you should not. Have I not heard you say a thousand times that you wanted to see this world, and do not I want to see you and hear all about the magical change that so short a time has made in your fortunes? Write, then, and tell me that you will come. Helen has had you for months, and it is my turn now."

"Ah, how little she knows!" Marion thought with a pang as she read the last words. The letter dropped from her hand into her lap; she felt as if she hardly cared to read further. Would Claire desire to see her if she knew the story of all that had happened since they parted? There was no one else in the world from whose judgment Marion shrank so much, and yet this summons seemed to her more of a command than an

invitation. It came as an answer to her doubts and indecision. "What shall I do? — where shall I go?" she had asked herself. "Come to me," Claire answered from across the sea; and it seemed to her that she had no alternative but to obey — to go, even though it were to meet Claire's condemnation.

That condemnation would be gentle, she knew, though perhaps unsparring. Helen's affection had indeed returned to her in a degree she could never have expected; but it is impossible that the stronger nature can depend upon the weaker, and she knew it was for Claire's unswerving standards and Claire's clear judgments her heart most strongly yearned.

So the way opened before her, and when she saw Helen next she announced her intention of going abroad to join Claire. "It seems the best — in fact, it is the only thing I can do," she said. "And Claire is good enough to want me. She fancies me still in possession of what she calls my fairy fortune — not knowing how fairy-like indeed it has proved, — and writes as if expense would be no consideration with me. But a mode of life which is not too expensive for her surely will not be too expensive for me with my ten thousand dollars. So I shall go."

"I suppose it is best," said Helen, wistfully; "and if it were not for mamma I would go with you."

The tone was a revelation to Marion of all that the tender, submissive heart was suffering still. "Why should your mother object?" she asked, quickly. "Come, Helen — come with me; and when we find Claire, let us try to forget everything, but the pleasure of being together again."

"I should like it," replied Helen, "but it is not

possible. I know how long mamma has looked forward to the pleasure of having me with her, and I can not go away now for my own selfish satisfaction, leaving her alone. Besides, I doubt if running away from painful things does much good. It is better to face them and grow resigned to them, with the help of God."

"I am sure that God must help *you*," cried Marion, "else you could never learn so many wise and hard things."

Helen looked at her with a little surprise in her clear blue eyes. "Of course He helps me," she answered. "When does He not help those who ask Him?"

"O Helen! if I only had your faith!" exclaimed Marion, with positive pain in her voice. "How easy it would make things!"

"Yes," replied Helen, with her sweet smile, "it does make things easy."

But before Marion could complete her preparations for departure, she was obliged to see Mr. George Singleton again and yet again. He came in the first place to remonstrate forcibly against her intentions with regard to the fortune, and found her society sufficiently attractive to induce him to pay inordinately long visits after he had discovered that his remonstrances were vain. "He is certainly very unconventional," Marion observed after one of these visits. "He does not strike one so much as violating social usage, as being ignorant of and holding it in contempt. In essential things he is a gentleman; but that his father — one of the most refined and fastidious of men — should have had a son who is half a savage, strikes me as very strange."

Young Singleton did not hesitate to speak of himself as altogether a savage, and to declare that the strain of wild lawlessness in his nature had brought about the estrangement between his father and himself. "Of course I am sorry for it all now," he said frankly to Marion; "but I don't see how it could have been avoided, we were so radically different in disposition and tastes. My father was a man to whom the conventionalities of life were of first importance, who held social laws and usages as more binding than the Decalogue; while I — well, a gypsy has as much regard for either as I had. I irritated and outraged *him* even when I had least intention of doing so; and he, in turn, roused all the spirit of opposition in *me*. I do not defend my conduct, but I think I may honestly say that he had something for which to blame himself. We were miserable together, and it ended as you know. He said when we parted that he had no longer a son, and I took him at his word — perhaps too literally. And that being so, Miss Lynde — his renunciation of me having been complete, and my acceptance of it complete also,— I really do not think that I have a right to come and take all his fortune."

"I am sorry if you have scruples on the subject, Mr. Singleton," Marion answered, quietly. "They ought to have occurred to you before you moved in the matter; now they are too late. I can not possibly accept the odium of holding a man's fortune when his own son is alive and has claimed it."

"But you know that I have always said I should be satisfied with part —"

Marion lifted her hand with a silencing gesture. "I know," she said, "that the affair is finally settled,

and not to be discussed any more. I am satisfied, and that ought to satisfy you. Now let us talk of something else. Are you aware that I am going abroad?"

"No," he replied, quickly, with a startled look. "Where are you going?"

"To Rome. I have a friend who is at present living there, and I am going to join her."

"But why?"

The point-blank question was so much in character with the speaker that Marion smiled.

"Why?" she repeated. "Well, I have nothing to keep me in this country, I am fond of my friend, and I wish to see the world — are not those reasons enough?"

"Perhaps so," he answered. He was silent for a moment, staring at her with his large, dark, brilliant eyes in a manner which tried even her self-possession. Then he asked, abruptly: "When are you going?"

"As soon as I can arrange my affairs. That sounds like a jest, but it is not: I really have some affairs to arrange. They will not occupy me very long, however. I shall probably leave in a week or ten days."

"Oh — I thought you might be going to-morrow!" said Mr. Singleton, with an air of relief.

After that he was a daily visitor, — such an open, persistent, long-staying visitor, that all Scarborough was soon on tiptoe of expectation. What did it mean? What would be the end of this sensational affair? Would the legitimate heir of the fortune marry the girl who had given it up without a contest? People began to say that Miss Lynde had been shrewd, and had known very well all the time what she was about.

Miss Lynde, on her part, felt as if she would never reach the end of the difficulties which seemed to evolve out of one another, according to a process of evolution with which we are all familiar. Had her passionate desire for wealth created a sort of moral Frankenstein, which would continue to pursue her? When, after a struggle known only to herself, she had decided to resign the fortune, she had thought that she cast away all perplexities arising out of it; but now it appeared that she had resigned only the money, and that the difficulties and perplexities remained. For, as clearly as any one else, she perceived — what indeed George Singleton made no effort to conceal — the object of his constant and assiduous attentions. The fortune she had given up was to be offered her again: she would again be forced to make a difficult choice.

For all that has been written of Marion Lynde has been written to little purpose if any one imagines that wealth had lost its glamour in her eyes, or that her old ambitions were dead within her. They had been for a time subdued, — for a time she had realized that one might be crushed by the weight of a granted prayer; but the old desires and the old attraction still remained strong enough to prove a potent force in the hour of temptation.

And she began to feel that it might be a temptation to regain in the most entire manner the fortune she had resigned; to cast one glance of triumphant scorn at Rathborne, who had fancied himself scheming for her downfall; to receive Mrs. Singleton's cousinly congratulations; and, above all, to prove to Brian Earle how easily she could console herself for his desertion — how readily another man offered the

homage he had withdrawn. Yes, all these things were temptations; for the sway of the world, of natural inclinations and passions, was still strong in this soul, which had leaned toward higher things without embracing them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARION did not in the least relax her preparations for departure, and she gave no sign to Mr. Singleton of perceiving the end which he had in view. They progressed very far toward intimacy in the course of their long interviews; but it was an intimacy which Marion regulated, and to which she gave its tone, preserving without difficulty command of the situation. Yet even while she commanded it, an instinct told her that the hour would come very soon when this man would assert himself; when her time of control would be over, and the feeling that betrayed itself in his eyes and voice would find expression in a manner beyond her power to regulate. Nevertheless, she was hardly prepared for the declaration when it came one day, abruptly and without anticipation on her part.

“I think, Miss Lynde,” said Singleton, “that it is time you and I understood each other—or, at least, that I understood *you*; for I am pretty sure that you understand *me* thoroughly. You know perfectly well that I am in love with you. Do you intend to marry me?”

“Mr. Singleton!” exclaimed Marion, startled and considerably discomposed. “Do I intend—” she

repeated. "How could I possibly have any intention in — in such a matter? That is a very extraordinary way of speaking."

"Is it?" said Singleton. "But you do not expect an ordinary way of speaking from me; for do you not make me understand every day how much of a savage I am? What can I do except ask your intentions? For you cannot say that you do not know I am in your hands to be dealt with as you like."

"I know nothing of the kind," she answered, hastily. "Why should I know it? I have been glad that we should be friends, but beyond that —"

"Do not talk nonsense!" he interrupted, somewhat roughly. "You are too clever a woman not to have been aware from the first that there was no friendship about it. As soon as I saw you, I made up my mind that I would marry you if you would agree to it. And why should you not agree? It will settle all difficulties about the fortune, and I am not really a bad fellow at heart. I assure you of that."

"I think I know very well what kind of fellow you are," said Marion, smiling in spite of herself. "Certainly not one who is formed on a very conventional model. I like you very much — I am sure you know that, — but I have no intention of marrying you."

It cost her something of an effort to say this — to put away, finally as it were, the glittering prize that life had cast in her way. But, thus brought face to face with the necessity for decision, she found that no other answer was possible to her. Yet the form of words that she chose did not convey her meaning in an unalterable sense to the man watching her with such keen, brilliant eyes.

“You have no intention of marrying me!” he repeated. “Does that mean that you will not form any such intention — that you will not take the subject into consideration?”

“There is no reason why I should,” she replied. “It is best that you should think no more of it.”

“I can not agree to that,” he said. “On the contrary, it seems to me best, from every point of view, that I should continue to think of it, and endeavor to bring it to pass. I warn you that I am not a man who is easily daunted. Unless you intend to marry some one else, I shall continue my efforts to induce you to marry me.”

“Not if I tell you there is no use in such efforts?” said Marion.

“You can not possibly tell whether there would be use in them or not,” he persisted, “unless you are decided with regard to some other man. If so, I hope you will tell me.”

“There is no other man in question,” she said, coldly. “I may surely be supposed to know my own mind without being bound to any one.”

“And I know mine,” he replied, “so positively that, until you are bound to some one else, I shall not relinquish the hope of inducing you to marry me. I give you fair warning of that.”

“Really, Mr. Singleton,” said Marion, who hardly knew whether to be vexed or amused, “you are a very singular person. Are you not aware that a man must abide by the woman’s decision in such a matter as this?”

“I am not so uncivilized as you imagine,” he answered. “Of course I know it. But everywhere

and always he has the right of endeavoring to change that decision if he can. And I have a double reason for desiring to change yours. I not only want to marry you, but I also want you to have your share of my fortune ”

“ I have no share in it,” she said, haughtily — for surely such a persistent suitor as this promised to be very troublesome; — “ you know that well, and you know also that I have forbidden you to speak of it to me.”

“ Henceforth I will endeavor to obey you,” he answered, with the courtesy which now and then contrasted oddly with the usual abruptness of his manner. “ But you can not forbid me to think of it — nor of you.”

“ I hope,” she said, “ that when I go away you will very soon cease to think of me.”

He smiled. “ Do you think,” he asked, “ that I shall not follow you? The way to Europe is as open to me as to you.”

“ But if I forbid it?” she cried, with a sudden sense of dismay.

“ You have no right to forbid it,” he answered, quietly. “ I have no intention of accompanying you, and I have surely been guilty of nothing which could lead you to disown my acquaintance should we meet in Rome or elsewhere.”

Marion fancied that after his declaration, and the refusal with which it had been met, George Singleton would leave Scarborough, since he had certainly no business to detain him there. But that gentleman proved himself to be of another opinion. He not only remained in Scarborough, but he continued his

visits with the same regularity which had characterized them before. Partly vexed, partly amused, Marion, nevertheless, took precautions to guard against any embarrassing renewal of his suit. She ceased to receive him alone, and whenever it was possible she turned him over to Helen for entertainment. To this he apparently did not object in the least. He had hardly met Miss Morley before, and her soft gentleness charmed him. It was the type of womanhood best suited to his own passionate, impulsive nature; and he yielded to its influence with an *abandon* that surprised himself.

“You have no idea what an effect you have upon me,” he said to her on one occasion. “When I come into your presence I am like a cat that is smoothed the right way — you put me into harmony and accord with all the world.”

It was impossible not to laugh at the frankness of this assertion, as well as the homeliness of the comparison. “I am very glad to hear that my presence has a good effect upon you,” said Helen; “although I do not know why it should be so.”

“I suppose some people would call it magnetism,” he answered; “but I think it is simply owing to the fact that your nature is so placid and gentle that you exercise a calming influence upon the passions of others.”

“My nature is not so placid and gentle as you imagine, perhaps,” she said, with something of a shadow stealing over her face. “I have passions too.”

“Have you?” he asked, rather incredulously. “Well, if so they must be of a very mild order, or else you understand managing them in a wonderful

manner. I wish you would teach me how to manage mine."

She looked at him with her blue eyes, and shook her head. "I am afraid you would not care to learn the only thing that I could teach," she said.

"Why not? I think that I should like to learn anything that you would teach."

"Perhaps, then, if our acquaintance lasts long enough, I may take you at your word some day," she replied, smiling.

In saying this she thought herself very safe; for she had little idea that their association would outlast the day on which Marion left Scarborough. She knew that the latter had been offered the opportunity of regaining her lost fortune in the most legitimate and satisfactory way, and had little doubt but that the matter would end by her accepting George Singleton.

"For Marion was never meant to be poor," she said to herself; "and he really seems to have a great deal of good in him — much more than one could have fancied. And he takes her treatment of him very nicely. It is kind of him to seem to like my society, instead of finding me a dreadful bore."

She said as much as this to Marion, who laughed. "There is very good reason for his not finding you a bore," Marion replied. "He enjoys your society much more than mine — it suits him better. I can see that very plainly. In fact, the thing is, that he and I are too much alike to assimilate well. We are both too fiery, too impulsive in our natures and strong in our passions. You are the counteracting influence that we need. Instinct tells him so, as experience tells me."

“Marion, what utter nonsense!”

“So far from that, the very best sense, my dear. There is only one person who has a more beneficial influence upon me than you have. That is Claire, and I am going to her. If Mr. Singleton is wise he will stay with you.”

“If I thought you were in earnest in saying such a thing as that, you would really provoke me,” said Helen, gravely.

“Then you may be sure that I am not in earnest,” cried Marion; “for I would do anything sooner than provoke you. No man in the world is worth a single vexed thought between you and me.”

It was a few days after this that, everything being at last settled, she finally left the place where she had gained and lost a fortune,— where she had sounded some depths of experience and learned some lessons of wisdom that could not soon be forgotten.

“Marion,” said Helen the evening before her departure, “I am going to have a Mass said for my intention to-morrow morning — and, of course, that means you. Will you not come to the church?”

“With pleasure,” answered the other, quickly. “Indeed I am not so absolutely a heathen but that I meant to go, in any event. I am setting out anew in life, as it were; and I should like to ask God to bless this second beginning, as I certainly did not ask Him to bless the first.”

“Then you will be at the church at eight o’clock?” said Helen. “And afterward breakfast with me, so that you will not need to return here before meeting your train. I should like the last bread that you break in Scarborough to be broken with me.”

“It shall be exactly as you wish,” observed Marion, touched by the request, which meant more, she knew, than appeared on the surface. For it was not only that Helen wished to renew the link of hospitality — not only that she desired, as she said, that the last bread broken by Marion in Scarborough should be broken with her in token of their renewed amity, — but she wished to show to all the world that had so curiously watched the course of events in which the beautiful stranger was concerned, that their friendly and cousinly relations were unchanged. All this Marion understood without words.

Eight o'clock the next morning found her in the church. As she acknowledged, she had asked no blessing of God on her former beginning of life — that life which had come to such utter failure in every respect; and in the realization of this failure much of her proud self-confidence had forsaken her. She had asked only that opportunity should be given, and she had felt within herself the power to win all that she desired. Opportunity *had* been given, and she had ended by losing everything, saving only the remnant of her self-respect and Helen's generous affection. These thoughts came to her with force as she knelt in the little chapel, knowing that she was going forth to a new life with diminished prospects of worldly success, but with a deeper knowledge of herself, of the responsibilities of existence, and of the claims of others, than she had possessed before.

Then she remembered how she had knelt in this same place with Brian Earle, and felt herself drawn near to the household of faith. It had been an attraction which had led to nothing, because it had

been founded on human rather than on divine love. Now that the human love was lost, had the divine no meaning left? The deep need of her soul answered this; and when she bent her head as the priest at the altar offered the Holy Sacrifice, it was with a more real act of faith and worship than she had made on that day when it seemed as if but a step divided her from the Church of God.

Mass over, she went to say a few words of farewell to Father Byrne, and then accompanied Helen home. It had been a long time since she entered her aunt's house; and the recollections of her first coming into it, and of the welcome which had then met her, seemed to rush upon her as she crossed the threshold. "If it were only to do over again!" she thought, with a pang. When they sat down to breakfast she glanced at the place which she had so often seen Rathborne occupy, and thought that but for her Helen might never have been undeceived, might never have suffered with regard to him. "At least not in the way she has suffered," she said to herself. "In some way, however, she must have suffered sooner or later. Therefore perhaps it is best as it is — for her. But that does not excuse me. If only I might be permitted to make some atonement!"

But atonement is difficult to make in this world, either for our mistakes or our wrong-doing. The logic of life is stern indeed. From certain acts flow certain consequences as inevitably as conclusions proceed from premises or night follows day. It is vain to cry out that we had no such end in view. The end comes despite our protests, and we are helpless in the face of that which springs from our own deed.

These reflections had in great measure become familiar to Marion, especially with regard to the pain she had brought upon Helen. She had been forced to realize clearly that what it would have been easily possible for her to avoid, it was absolutely impossible for her to repair. To Helen's own goodness, generosity and gentleness she owed the relief that had come to her on the subject. Nevertheless, she longed greatly for some means of repairing the injury she had done, the suffering she had caused, and — was it an inspiration which suddenly seemed to suggest to her such a means?

CHAPTER XXIX.

BREAKFAST over, they went into the familiar sitting-room — for there was still an hour or two before Marion's train was due, — and it was there that Helen said, with a smile: "Mr. Singleton is coming to see you off: I met him yesterday evening after I left you, and he announced his intention of doing so; so I asked him to come here and accompany us to the train. Of course there is no *need* of him: the boys will do all that is necessary; but I thought it would look better. People have talked so much about you both, that I would like them to have a public proof that you are really on very good terms."

"You think of everything, Helen," said Marion. "What a wise little head you have!"

"Do you think it is the head?" asked Helen. "I think it is the heart. One feels things rather than thinks them — at least I do."

"I know you do," said her cousin. "It is your heart in the first place; but you must not underrate your head, which certainly has something to do with it."

Helen shook the appendage in question. "Not much," she answered. "I have never fancied that my strong point was in my head."

“Head or heart, you are seldom wrong,” said Marion, “when it comes to a practical decision. Whereas I—you know I have been very vain of my cleverness, and yet I am always wrong—no, don’t contradict me; I mean exactly what I say, and I have the best possible reason for meaning it. But, Helen, let me ask one favor of you. When Mr. Singleton comes, leave me alone with him for a few minutes. Now mind, *only* for a few minutes. I have something to say to him, but it will take only a little time to say it.”

“That will be easily arranged,” said Helen, who would not suffer herself even to look a question.

So when Mr. Singleton presently arrived, she spirited herself and her mother out of the room in the most unobtrusive manner possible, leaving the young man alone with Marion.

The latter did not waste one of the minutes for which she had asked. She plunged without preface into the subject on which she desired to speak. “Mr. Singleton,” she began, abruptly, “I am going to say something very unconventional; but you who are so unconventional yourself will pardon me, I am sure. Briefly, I am going to recall to your mind something that you said when—when we had our last private conversation. You then declared your intention of following me abroad, is it not so?”

“Yes,” answered Singleton, with composure; “I did, and I meant what I said. You will soon see me over there.”

“I think not—I hope not,” she said, quickly; “for I am sure that you have too much self-respect to persecute a woman with attentions which can lead to

nothing. And I tell you in the most positive manner that they can only bring you disappointment."

"You can not be sure of that," he observed, with a touch of his former obstinacy. "Women have sometimes changed their minds."

She shook her head. "Not women who feel as I do. Listen, and I will tell you the whole truth about myself, since there is no other way of convincing you. I will not deny that what you offer is in some degree a temptation to me — I am worldly enough and unworthy enough for that; and it has been a temptation, too, to suffer you to follow me, and keep, as it were, the chance open, in case I should find that it was the best life offered me. But I know this would be wrong; for I cannot deceive myself into fancying that there is any doubt whatever about my feelings. If my heart were empty, you might in time fill it. But it is not — I will be perfectly frank with you at any cost to myself,—another man has long since filled it."

There was a pause after these words — words which it cost Marion very much to utter. To acknowledge even to herself the fact which they expressed was hard enough; but to acknowledge it to another, to this man who sat regarding her steadily with his dark, brilliant eyes, was harder still. But in courage, at least, she was not deficient, and her own eyes met his without drooping.

"You see now why I can not let you follow a false hope in following me," she continued, when after a moment he had still not spoken. "I may be mercenary in some degree, but I am not mercenary enough to marry you for the sake of your fortune, when I love another man. I have tried to crush this love, and it

humiliates me to acknowledge it ; but I have incurred the humiliation in order to be perfectly frank with you, and to keep you from making a great mistake."

The last words seemed to touch him suddenly. His whole face — a face which showed every passing emotion — changed and softened. " Believe me," he said, " I appreciate your frankness, and I see no humiliation in your confession. It is good of you, however, to suffer the pain of making it in order to save me from what you think would be a mistake."

" I *know* that it would be a mistake — a mistake in every way," she said, earnestly. " And I have made so many mistakes already that I cannot add another to the list. Believe me, if you succeeded in persuading me to marry you, it would be a mistake which we would both regret to the end of our lives. For we do not suit each other at all. When you marry you ought to select a woman different altogether from what I am : a woman gentler, yet with more moral strength."

" That may be," he answered, in a meditative tone ; " but, then, no other woman can be the one to whom my father has left his fortune, who has generously given it back to me, and with whom I should like to share it."

" That is a feeling which I can understand, and which does you credit," she said. " But do you not see that I could hardly accept your suit on such a ground as that ? It would have been better to have kept your fortune than to do that. No, Mr. Singleton : I beg you to think no more of this ; I beg you not to follow me with any such thought in your mind. Promise me that you will not."

She leaned toward him in her earnestness, and held out her hand with a gesture of entreaty. George Sin-

gleton had something chivalrous in his nature, under all his brusque exterior; and taking the little hand he raised it to his lips.

“The confidence that you have placed in me,” he said, “makes it impossible that I can do anything to annoy you. Your request is a command. I shall not follow you.”

Her eyes thanked him. “Now I can go in peace, because I shall not have to think that I am misleading any one. However hard or lonely my path in life may be, I want henceforth to keep my conscience clear. I have tasted the bitterness of self-reproach, and I know what it is. Yes, you will stay. You have duties here now, and — and I hope it will not be long before you will find happiness.”

He had no opportunity to reply, if he had been inclined to do so. Helen, remembering Marion’s urgent request that the minutes allowed for her “few words” might be short, was heard approaching. Her clear, sweet voice gave some orders in the hall, and then she entered the room.

“I grieve to say, Marion, that it is almost time for you to go,” she announced. “Ah, how sad parting is!”

Half an hour later, when Marion was borne away from Scarborough, her last backward glance showed her Helen and Singleton standing side by side on the station platform, waving her an adieu; and if she smiled at the sight, it cannot be denied that she also sighed. With her own hand she had closed the door of a possibly brilliant destiny; and, naturally enough, it had never looked so bright as when she said to herself, “That is over finally and forever.”

CHAPTER XXX.

IT was with little pause for sight-seeing on the way that Marion made her journey to Rome. A few days in Paris constituted her only delay; then, flying swiftly down through Italy — reserving until later the pleasure of seeing the beautiful historic cities which she passed — she did not stop again until she found herself within the walls of Rome.

And not even the fact of entering by means of a prosaic railway could lessen the thrill with which she realized that she was indeed within the city of the Cæsars and the Popes — the city that since the beginning of historic time has been the chief center of the earth, the mistress of the world, and the seat of the apostolic throne. It was strange to feel herself in this place of memories, yet to step into a modern railway station, resounding with noise and bustle; but even Rome was forgotten when she found herself in Claire's arms, and Claire's sweet voice bade her welcome.

What followed seemed like a dream — the swift drive through populous streets, with glimpses of stately buildings and narrow, picturesque ways; the passing under a great, sounding arch into a court, where the soft splash of a fountain was heard as

soon as the carriage stopped; the ascent of an apparently interminable flight of stone steps, and pausing at length on a landing, where an open door gave access to an ante-chamber, and thence through parting curtains to a long *salon*, where a pretty, elderly lady rose to give Marion greeting. This was Claire's kind friend and chaperon, Mrs. Kerr, who said to herself, as she took the young stranger's hand, "What a beautiful creature!"

Marion, on her part, was charmed, not only with Mrs. Kerr, but with all her surroundings. The foreign aspect of everything enchanted her; the Italian servants, the Italian dishes of the collation spread for her, the soft sound of the language, — all entered into and made part of her pleasure. "O Claire!" she said, when present'y she was taken to the pretty chamber prepared for her. "I think I am going to be so happy with you — if only you are not disgusted with *me*, when you hear the story I have to tell you!"

Claire laughed, as she bent and kissed her. "I have not the least fear that I shall be disgusted with you," she said. "You might do wrong things, Marion — things one would blame or censure, — but I am sure that you will never do a mean thing, and it is mean things which disgust one."

"Ah!" said Marion, with a sigh, "do not be too sure. I am not going to possess your good opinion on false pretenses, so you shall hear to-morrow all that has happened since we parted. Prepare your charity, for I shall need it."

And, indeed, on the next day Claire heard with the utmost fullness all that had occurred since the two parted at their convent school. As far as the

Rathborne incident was concerned, Marion did not spare herself; and, although Claire looked grave over her self-accusation, she was unable to express any regret that, even at the cost of Helen's suffering, the engagement of the latter to Rathborne should have been ended. "I saw the man only once," she said, "but that was enough to make me distrust him thoroughly. He has a bad face — a face which shows a narrow and cruel nature. I always trembled at the thought of Helen's uniting her life to his. There seemed no possible prospect of happiness for her in such a choice. So I am glad that at almost any cost the engagement — entanglement, or whatever it was — has been ended. And I can not see that your share in it was so very heinous."

"That is because I have not made it clear to you, then," answered Marion. "I, too, always distrusted the man, but I liked his admiration, his homage; it was my first taste of the power for which, you know, I always longed. Indeed, Claire, there are no excuses to be made for me; and if the matter ended well for Helen — as I really believe it did, — I am still to blame for all her suffering; and you do not think that evil is less evil because good comes of it?"

"I certainly do not think that," said Claire. "But you had no evil intention, I am sure: you never *meant* to hurt Helen."

"No, I did not mean to do so, but I was careless whether she suffered or not. I thought only of myself — my own vanity, my own amusement. Nothing can change that, and so I have always felt that it was right I should suffer just as I made her suffer. Retribution came very quickly, Claire."

“Did it?” asked Claire. Her soft, gray eyes were full of unspoken sympathy. “Well, suffering is a great thing, dear; it enables us to expiate so much! Tell me about yours — if you like.”

“I feel as if I had come here just to tell you,” said Marion. And then followed the story of her engagement to Brian Earle, her anger because he would not comply with his uncle’s wishes, their parting, her unexpected inheritance of Mr. Singleton’s fortune, Rathborne’s revenge in finding the lost heir, her surrender of the fortune to him, and her rejection of his suit.

“So here I am,” she observed in conclusion, with a faint smile, “like one who has passed through terrible storms: who has been shipwrecked and has barely escaped with life — that is, with a fragment of self-respect. I am so glad I had strength to give up that fortune, Claire! You know how I always desired wealth.”

“I know so well,” said Claire, “that I am proud of you — proud that you had the courage to do what must have cost you so much. But I always told you that I knew you better than you knew yourself; and I was sure that you would never do anything unworthy, not even to gain the end you had so much at heart. But, Marion” — her face grew grave, — “I have something to tell you that I fear may prove unpleasant to you. Brian Earle is here.”

“Brian Earle here!” repeated Marion. She became very pale, and for a moment was silent. Then she said, proudly, “I hope no one will imagine that I suspected this. I thought he was in Germany. But it will not be necessary for me to meet him.”

“That must be for you to decide,” said Claire, in a somewhat troubled tone. “He comes to see us occasionally — he is an old friend of Mrs. Kerr’s — but, if you desire it, I will ask her to let him know that it will be best for him to discontinue his visits.”

“No,” said Marion, with quick, instinctive recoil; “for that would be to acknowledge that I shrink from seeing him. If I *do* shrink, he shall not be made aware of it. Perhaps, when he knows that I am here, he will desire to keep away. If not, I am — I will be strong enough to meet him with indifference.”

Claire looked at her steadily, wistfully; it seemed as if she were trying to know all that might be known. “If you do not feel indifference,” she said, gently, after a moment, “is it well to simulate it?”

“How can you ask such a question?” demanded Marion, with a touch of her old haughtiness. “It is not only well — it is essential to my self-respect. But I do not acknowledge that it will be simulation. Why should I be other than indifferent to Brian Earle? As I confessed to you a few minutes ago, I suffered when we parted, but that is over now.”

“You care for him no longer, then?”

“Is it possible I could care for a man who has treated me as he has done? For I still believe that it was his duty to have remained with his uncle, and if — if he had cared for me at all he would have done so.”

“But perhaps,” said Claire, “he perceived that passionate desire of yours for wealth, and thought that it would not be well for you to have it gratified. I can imagine that.”

“You imagine, then, exactly what he was go d

enough to say," replied Marion, dryly. "But I suppose you know enough of me to be also able to imagine that I was not very grateful for such a form of regard. He talked like a moralist, but he certainly did not feel like a lover, and so I let him go. I am not sorry for that."

"Then," said Claire, after a short pause of reflection, "I cannot see any reason why you should avoid meeting him. There may be a little awkwardness at first; but, if you have really no feeling for him, that will pass away."

"I should prefer to avoid such a meeting, if possible," answered Marion; "but if not possible, I will endure. Only, if you can, give me warning when it is likely to occur."

"That, unfortunately, is what I can hardly do," said Claire, in a tone of regret. "Our friends have established a habit of dropping in, without formality, almost any evening; and so we never know who is coming, or when."

"In that case there is, of course, nothing to be done. I can only promise that, whenever the occasion occurs, I will try to be equal to it."

"I have no doubt of that," answered Claire.

But she looked concerned as she went away, and it was evident to Mrs. Kerr that she was more than usually thoughtful that evening. As she had said, their friends in Rome found it pleasant to drop informally into their pretty *salon*. Artists predominated among these friends; so it was not strange that she watched the door, thinking that Brian Earle might come, and conscious of a wish that he would; for Marion, pleading fatigue, declined to appear on this

first evening after her arrival; and Claire said to herself that if Earle *did* come, it would give her an opportunity to tell him what meeting lay before him, and he could then avoid it if he chose to do so. When, as the evening passed on, it became at length clear that he was not coming -- and there was no reason beside her own desire for expecting him, -- Claire thought, with a sigh, that events must take their course, since it was plainly out of her power to direct them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AND events did take their course, when, a few evenings later, Marion suddenly saw Earle entering the *salon*, where three or four visitors were already assembled. She herself was at the farther end of the room, and somewhat concealed by a large Oriental screen, near which she was seated. She was very glad of this friendly shelter when she felt her heart leap in a manner which fairly terrified her, as, glancing up, she saw Earle's face in the doorway. Her own emotion surprised her far more than his appearance; she shrank farther back into the shadow to conceal what she feared might be perceptible to others, and yet she could not refrain from following him with her eyes.

What she saw was this — that, even while greeting Mrs. Kerr, his glance wandered to Claire; that his first eager step was taken in her direction; and that his face, when he took her hand, was so eloquent of pleasure and tender admiration that it made Marion recall some words he had spoken when they first knew each other in Scarborough. “She charmed me,” he had said then of Claire; “she is so simple, so candid, so intent upon high aims.” Every word came back with sudden distinctness, with sudden, piercing meaning and weight, in the light of the look on Earle's face.

“He is in love with Claire!” said Marion to herself. “Nothing could be more natural, nothing more suitable. There is no struggle *here* between his heart and his judgment, as was the case with me. She seems to be made for him in every respect. Why did I not think of it sooner, and why did not Claire tell me that he had transferred his affection to her? Did she want me to see for myself, or did she think that I should not see? But there is no reason why I should care—none whatever.”

Even while she repeated this assurance to herself, however, the sinking of her heart, the trembling of her hands, belied it, and frightened her by the evidence of a feeling she had not suspected. Surely, among the mysteries of our being, there is none greater than the existence and growth of feelings which we not only do not encourage, but of which we are often in absolute ignorance until some flash of illumination comes to reveal to us their strength.

Such a flash came now to Marion. She had assured herself that she had put Brian Earle out of her heart, and instead she suddenly found that, during the interval in which she had condemned it to darkness and silence, her feeling for him had increased rather than lessened. And she was now face to face with the proof that he had forgotten her—that he had found in Claire the true ideal of his fancy! She felt that it was natural, she acknowledged that it was just, but the shock was overpowering.

Fortunately, she happened at that moment to be alone—a gentleman who had been talking to her having crossed the room to ask Mrs. Kerr a question. Seeing him about to retrace his steps, a sudden

instinct of flight — of flight at any cost of personal dignity — seized Marion. She felt that in another instant Claire would point her out to Earle, that he would be forced to come and address her. Could she bear that? — was she able to meet him as indifferently as she desired to do? Her beating pulses told her no; and, without giving herself time to think, she rose, lifted a *portière* near her, and passed swiftly and silently from the room.

Claire, meanwhile, glanced up at Earle; and she, too, met that look of tender admiration which Marion perceived. It was not the first time she had met it, but it was the first time that a consciousness of its possible meaning flashed upon her. She did not color at the thought, but grew instead suddenly pale, and glanced toward the corner of the room where Marion at that instant had made her escape; but Claire did not perceive this, and, with the sense of her presence, said to Earle:—

“You have probably not heard that my friend Marion Lynde is here?”

He started. “Miss Lynde *here* — in Rome!” he asked. “No, I had not heard it. Why has she come?”

“To see and to be with me,” answered Claire, calmly. “You know, perhaps, that we are great friends.”

“I have heard Miss Lynde speak of you,” he said, regaining self-possession; “and if the friendship struck me as rather a strange one, knowing little of you as I did then, you may be sure that it strikes me now as more than strange. I have never met two people in my life who seemed to me to have less in common.”

“Pardon me!” returned Claire. “You think so because you do not know either of us very well. We have really a great deal in common, and I doubt if any one in the world knows Marion as well as I do.”

He looked at her with a sudden keen glance from under brows somewhat bent. “Are you not aware that I had at one time reason to fancy that I knew Miss Lynde quite well?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Claire, with frankness; “I know. She has told me of that. But in such a relation as the one which existed between you for a time, people sometimes learn very little of each other. And I think that perhaps you did not learn very much of her.”

“I learned quite enough,” he replied,—“all that was necessary to convince me that I had made a great mistake. And there can be no doubt that Miss Lynde reached the same conclusion. That, I believe, is all that there is to say of the matter.” He paused a moment, then added, “If she is here, I hope it will not be unpleasant to her to meet me; since I should be sorry to be banished from this *salon*, which Mrs. Kerr and yourself make so attractive.”

“There is no reason for banishment, unless you desire it,” said Claire. “Marion does not object to meeting you. But I think that there are one or two things that you ought to know before you meet her. Are you aware, in the first place, that she has given up your uncle’s fortune?”

“No,” he answered, very much startled. “Why has she done so?”

“Because Mr. Singleton’s son appeared, and she

thought that he should in justice possess his father's fortune. Do you not think she was right?"

"Right?—I suppose so. But this is very astonishing news. You are positively certain that George Singleton, my uncle's son, is alive?"

"I am certain that Mariou has told me so, and I do not suppose she is mistaken, since she has resigned a fortune to him. People are usually sure before they take such a step as that."

"Yes," he assented, "but it seems almost incredible. For years George Singleton has been thought to be dead, and I was under the impression that my uncle had positive reason for believing him so. This being the case, there was no reason why he should not leave his fortune as he liked, and I was glad when I heard that he had left it to Miss Lynde; for the possession of wealth seemed to be the first desire of her heart."

"Poor Marion!" said Claire, gently. "You might be more tolerant of that desire if you knew all that she has suffered—suffered in a way peculiarly hard to her—from poverty. And she has surely proved in the most conclusive manner that, however much she desired wealth, she was not prepared to keep it at any cost to her conscience or her self-respect."

"Did she, then, resign *all* the fortune?"

"Very nearly all. She said that she reluctantly retained only a few thousand dollars."

"But is it possible that George Singleton did not insist upon providing for her fitly? Whatever his other faults, he was not mercenary—formerly."

"Mr. Singleton must have tried every possible argument to induce her to keep half the fortune, but

she refused to do so. I think she felt keenly some reflections that had been thrown on her by Mr. Singleton's relatives, and wished to disprove them."

Earle was silent for a minute. He seemed trying to adjust his mind to these new views of Marion's character. "And you tell me that she is here — with you?"

"I was about to say that she is in the room," Claire answered; "but I do not see her just now. She was here a few minutes ago."

"Probably my appearance sent her away. Perhaps she would rather not meet me."

"She assured me that she did not object to meeting you; and, unless you give up our acquaintance, I do not see how such a meeting can be avoided; for she has come to stay in Rome some time."

"Well," said Earle, with an air of determination, "I certainly have no intention of giving up your acquaintance. Be sure of that. And it would go hard with me to cease visiting here in the pleasant, familiar fashion Mrs. Kerr and yourself have allowed me to fall into. So if Miss Lynde does not object to meeting me, there assuredly is not the least reason why I should object to meeting her."

Claire would have liked to ask, in her sincere, straightforward fashion, if all his feeling for Marion was at an end; and she might have done so but for the recollection of the look which had startled her. She did not acknowledge to herself in so many words what that look might mean; but it made her instinctively avoid any dangerous question, and she was not sorry when at this point their *tête-à-tête* was interrupted.

But Marion did not reappear; and when Claire at

length went to seek her, she found that she had retired. Her room was in partial darkness, so that her face could not be seen, but her voice sounded altogether as usual when she accounted for her disappearance.

“I found that I was more tired than I had imagined by our day of sight-seeing,” she said. “I grew so stupid that flight was the only resource. Pray make my excuses to Mr. Gardner. I vanished while he went across the room, and I suppose he was astonished to find an empty chair when he returned.”

“Do you know that Mr. Earle entered just at the time you left?” asked Claire, who had her suspicions about this sudden flight.

“Did he?” said Marion, in a tone of indifference. “Fortunately, it is not necessary to make my excuses to him. There is no more reason why he should wish to see me than why I should wish to see him. Another time will answer as well to exchange some common-places of greeting. Good-night, dear! Don’t let me detain you longer from your friends.”

“I am so sorry you are tired! Hereafter we must be more moderate in sight-seeing,” observed Claire.

As she went out of the room she said to herself that she must wait before she could decide anything with regard to the feelings of these two people. Was their alienation real and complete? One seemed as cold and indifferent as the other. But did this coldness only mask the old affection, or was it genuine? Claire had some instincts which seldom misled her, and one of these instincts made her fear that the indifference was more genuine with Earle than with Marion. “That would be terrible,” she said to herself: “if *he* has forgotten and *she* has not. If it were only possible

that they would tell the simple truth! But that, I suppose, cannot be expected. If I knew it, I would know how to act; but as it is I can only wait and observe. I believe, however, that Marion left the room because he appeared; and if his presence has such an effect on her, she certainly cares for him yet."

Marion was already writhing under the thought that this very conclusion would be drawn—perhaps by Earle himself,—and determining that she would never again be betrayed into such weakness. "It was the shock of surprise," she said in self-extenuation. "I was not expecting anything of *that* kind, and it naturally startled me. I know it now, and it will have no such effect a second time. I suppose I might have looked for it if I had not been so self-absorbed. Certainly it is not only natural, but very suitable. They seem made for each other; and I—I do hope they may be happy. But I must go away as soon as I can. That is necessary."

It was several days after this that the meeting between herself and Earle took place. She had been with Claire for some hours in the galleries of the Vatican, and finally before leaving they entered the beautiful Raphael Loggia—that lovely spot filled with light and color, where the most exquisite creations of the king of painters glow with immortal sunshine from the walls. As they entered and paced slowly down its length, a figure was advancing from the other end of the luminous vista toward them. Marion recognized this figure before Claire did, and so had a moment in which to take firm hold of her self-possession before the latter, turning to her quickly, said, "Yonder comes Mr. Earle."

“So I perceive,” replied Marion, quietly. “He has not changed sufficiently to make an introduction necessary.”

The next moment they had met, were shaking hands, and exchanging greetings. Of the two Marion preserved her composure best. Earle was surprised by his own emotion when he saw again the face that once had power to move him so deeply. He had said to himself that its power was over, that he was cured in the fullest sense of that which he looked back upon as brief infatuation; but now that he found himself again in Marion’s presence, a thrill of the old emotion seemed to stir, and for a moment rendered him hardly able to speak.

Conventionalities are powerful things, however, and the emotion must be very strong that is not successfully held in check by them. Claire went on speaking in her gentle voice, giving the others time to recover any self-possession which they might have lost.

“We just came for a turn in this beautiful place before going home,” she said to Earle. “They are my delight, these *loggia* of the Vatican. All the sunshine and charm of Italy seem to meet in the divine loveliness of the frescos within, and the beauty of the classic gardens without. A Papal audience is never so picturesque, I am sure, as when it is held in one of these noble galleries.”

Earle assented rather absently; then saying, “If you are about to go home, I will see you to your carriage,” turned and joined them. It was a singular sensation to find himself walking again by Marion’s side; and the recollection of their last parting returned so vividly to his mind that when he spoke he

could only say, "My poor uncle's life was much shorter than I imagined it would be, Miss Lynde."

"Yes," replied Marion, quietly. "His death was a great surprise to everyone. I am sure you did not think when you parted from him that his life would be numbered only by weeks."

"I certainly did not think so," he answered, with emphasis. Then he paused and hesitated. Conversation seemed hedged with more difficulties than he had anticipated. His parting with his uncle had been so closely connected with his parting from Marion, that he found it a subject impossible to pursue. He dropped it abruptly, therefore, and remarked: "I was greatly surprised to learn from Miss Alford that my cousin George Singleton is alive, and has returned from the wild regions in which he buried himself."

This was a better opening. Marion replied that Mr. Singleton's appearance had astonished everyone concerned, but that his identity was fully established. "Indeed," she added, "I do not think there was a doubt in the mind of any one after he made his personal appearance."

"And you gave up your fortune to him?" said Earle, with a sudden keen glance at her.

She colored. "I did not feel that it was *my* fortune," she answered, "but rather his. Surely his father must have believed him dead, else he would never have made such a disposition of his property."

"That was my impression — that he believed him dead. But it is difficult to speak with certainty about a man so peculiar and so reticent as my uncle. You will, perhaps, pardon me for saying that, since he had

left you his fortune, I do not think you were bound to resign it all."

"I suppose," said Marion, somewhat coldly, "that I was not bound to resign any of it: I had, no doubt, a legal right to keep whatever the law did not take from me. But I am not so mercenary as you believe. I could not keep what I did not believe to be rightfully mine."

Despite pride, her voice trembled a little over the last words; and Earle was immediately filled with self-reproach to think that he had wounded her.

"So far from believing you mercenary," he said gravely, "I think that you have acted with extraordinary generosity,—a generosity carried, indeed, beyond prudence. Forgive me for alluding to the subject. I only regret that my uncle's intentions toward you have been so entirely frustrated."

"I have the recollection of his great kindness," she said, hurriedly. "I know that he desired to help me, therefore I felt it right to keep something. I did not leave myself penniless."

"You would have been wrong if you had done so," remarked Earle; "but it would have been better still if you had kept a fair amount of the fortune."

"Oh, no!" she replied; "for I had no claim to any of it—no claim, I mean, of relationship. I was a stranger to your uncle, and I only kept such an amount as it seemed to me a kind-hearted man might give to a stranger who had wakened his interest. Mr. George Singleton was very kind, too. He wished me to keep more, but I would not."

"I understand how you felt," said Earle; "and I fear I should have acted in the same manner myself,

so I really cannot blame you. I only think it a pity."

The gentleness and respect of his tone touched and pleased her. She felt that it implied more approval and sympathy than he liked to express. Unconsciously her eyes thanked him; and when they parted a little later in one of the courts of the Vatican, each felt that the awkwardness of meeting was over, and that there was no reason why they should shrink from meeting again.

"I have wronged her," said Earle to himself as he strolled away. "She is not the absolutely mercenary and heartless creature I had come to believe her. I might have known that I was wrong, or Miss Alford would not make a friend of her. Whoever *she* likes must be worthy of being liked."

CHAPTER XXXII.

IT was soon apparent to Marion that Claire's talent was as fully recognized by the artists who made her circle now, as it had been by the nuns in the quiet convent she had left. They praised her work, they asked her judgment upon their own, and they prophesied a great future for her — a future of the highest distinction and the most solid rewards.

“I knew how it would be, Claire,” Marion said one day, as she sat in the studio of the young artist watching her at work. “I always knew that *you* would succeed, whoever else failed. Do you remember our last conversation together — you and Helen and I — the evening before we left school, when we told one another what we desired most in life? *I* said money; well, I have had it, and was forced to choose between giving it up or giving up my self-respect. I have found out already that there are worse things than to be poor. Helen said happiness — poor, dear Helen! and the happiness of which she was thinking slipped out of her fingers like a vapor. But you, Claire,— *you* chose something worthy: you chose success in art, and God has given it to you.”

“Yes,” observed Claire, meditatively, “I have had some success; I feel within myself the power to do

good work, and my power is recognized by those whose praise is of value. I feel that my future is assured — that I can make money enough for all my needs, and also the fame which it is natural for every artist to desire. But, Marion, do you know that with this realization has come a great sense of its unsatisfactoriness? There are days in which I lay down my brushes and say to myself ‘*Cui bono?*’ as wearily as the most world-weary man.”

“Claire, it is impossible!”

Claire smiled a little sadly as she went on mixing her colors. “It is very possible and very true,” she said. “And I suppose the moral of it is that there is no real satisfaction in the possession of any earthly ideal. We desire it, we work for it, and when we get it we find that it has no power to make us happy. We three, each of us in different ways, found that out, Marion.”

“But there was no similarity in the ways,” replied Marion. “Mine was an unworthy ideal, and Helen’s a foolish one; but yours was all that it ought to be, and it seems to me that you should be perfectly happy in the attainment of it.”

“And so I am happy,” said Claire. “Do not mistake me. I am happy, and very grateful to God; but I cannot pretend to a satisfaction in the attainment of my wishes which I do not find. There is something lacking. Though I love art, it does not fill the needs of my nature. I want something more — something which I do not possess — as an object, an incentive —”

She broke off abruptly, and Marion was silent for a moment from sheer astonishment. That Claire should

feel in this way — Claire so calm, so self-contained, so devoted to her art, so ambitious of success in it — amazed her beyond the power of expression, until suddenly a light dawned upon her and she seemed to see what it meant. It meant — it *must* mean — that Claire in her loneliness felt the need of love, and the ties that love creates. Friends were all very well, but friends could not satisfy the heart in the fullest sense; neither could the pleasure of painting pictures, nor the praise of critics, however warm. Yes, Claire desired love — that was plain; and love was at hand for her to take — love that Marion had thrown away.

“It is just and right,” said the latter to herself. “I have nothing to complain of — nothing! And she must not think that I will regret it. I must find a way to make her understand this.” After a minute she spoke aloud: “Certainly you have surprised me, Claire; for I did think that *you* were happy. But I suppose the moral is, as you say, that the attainment of no object which we set before ourselves is able to render us thoroughly satisfied. But your pictures are so beautiful that it must be a pleasure to paint them.”

“Genius is too great a word to apply to me,” remarked Claire, quietly. “But it *is* a pleasure to paint; I should be ungrateful beyond measure if I denied that. I have much happiness in it, and I am more than content with the success God has granted me. I only meant to say that it has not the power to satisfy me completely. But that, I suppose, nothing of a purely earthly nature can have.”

“Do you think not?” asked Marion, rather wistfully. This is “a hard saying” for youth to believe, even after experience has somewhat taught its truth.

Indeed the belief that there may be lasting good in some earthly ideal, eagerly sought, eagerly desired, does not end with youth. Men and women pursue such delusions to the very end of life, and lie down at last in the arms of death without having ever known any lasting happiness, or lifted their eyes to the one Ideal which can alone satisfy the yearning of their poor human hearts.

This glimpse of Claire's inmost feeling was not forgotten by Marion. It seemed to her that it made matters plain, and she had now no doubt how the affair would end as regarded Earle. She said again to herself, "I must go away;" but she knew that to go immediately would be to betray herself, and this she passionately desired not to do. Therefore she did what was the next best thing — she avoided Earle as much as possible, so markedly indeed that it would have been impossible for him to force himself upon her even if he had desired to do so. She persevered in this line of conduct so resolutely that Claire began to think that some conclusions she had drawn at first were a mistake, and that the alienation between these two was indeed final.

But Marion's success cost her dearly. It was a severe discipline through which she was passing — a discipline which tried every power of her nature, in which there was a constant struggle to subdue everything that was most dominant within her. (Passion that had grown stronger with time, selfishness that demanded what it desired, vanity that smarted under forgetfulness, and pride that longed to assert itself in power,— all of these struggled against the resolution which kept them down.) But the resolution did not

fail. "After having thrown away my own happiness by my own fault, I will die before I sacrifice Claire's," she determined. But it was a hard battle to fight alone; and, had she relied solely upon her own strength, might never have been fought at all, or at least would have ended very soon. But Rome is still Rome, in that it offers on every side such spiritual aids and comforts as no other spot of earth affords.

If Marion had begun to find mysterious peace in the bare little chapel of Scarborough, was she less likely to find it here in these ancient sanctuaries of faith, these great basilicas that in their grandeur dwarf all other temples of earth,—that in their beauty are like glimpses of the heavenly courts, and in their solemn holiness lay on the spirit a spell that language can but faintly express? It was not long before this spell came upon her like a fascination. When the heavy curtains swung behind her, and she passed from the sunlight of the streets into the cool dimness of some vast church; when through lines of glistening marble columns — columns quarried for pagan temples by the captives of ancient Rome — she passed to chapels rich with every charm of art and gift of wealth,—to sculptured altars where for long ages the Divine Victim had been offered, and the unceasing incense of prayer ascended,—she felt as if she asked only to remain and steep her weary heart and soul in the ineffable repose which she found there.

She expressed something of this one day to Claire, when they passed out of Santa Maria Maggiore into the light of common day; and Claire looked at her, with a smile in her deep grey eyes.

"Yes," she said, in her usual quiet tone, "I know

that feeling very well. But it is not possible to have only the comfort of religion: we must taste also the struggle and the sacrifice it demands. We must leave the peace of the sanctuary to fight our appointed battle in the world, or else we must make one great sacrifice and leave the world to find our home and work in the sanctuary. I do not think that will ever be your vocation, Marion, so you must be content with carrying some of the peace of the sanctuary back with you into the world. Only, my dear" — her voice sank a little, — "I think if you would take one decisive step, you would find that peace more real and enduring."

"I know what you mean," answered Marion, thoughtfully. "I cannot tell why I have delayed so long. I certainly believe whatever the Catholic Church teaches, because I am sure that if she has not the truth in her possession, it is not on earth. I am willing to do whatever she commands, but I am not devotional, Claire. I cannot pretend to be."

"There is no need to pretend," returned Claire, gently; "nor yet to torment yourself about your deficiency in that respect. Yours is not a devotional nature, Marion; but all the more will your service be of value, because you will offer it not to please yourself, but to obey and honor God. Do not fear on that account, but come let me take you to my good friend, Monsignor R —."

"Take me where you will," said Marion. "If I can only retain and make my own the peace that I sometimes feel in your churches, I will do anything that can be required of me."

"I do not think you will find that anything hard

will be required of you," observed Claire, with a smile that was almost angelic in its sweetness and delight.

And truly Marion found, as myriads have found before her, that no path was ever made easier, more like the guiding of a mother's hand, than that which led her into the Church of God. So gentle were the sacramental steps, and each so full of strange, mysterious sweetness, that this period ever after seemed like a sanctuary in her life — a spot set apart and sacred, as hallowed with the presence of the Lord. She had willingly followed the suggestion of the good priest, and gone into a convent for a few days before her reception into the Church. This reception took place in the lovely convent chapel, where, surrounded by the nuns, with only Claire and Mrs. Kerr present from the outer world, it seemed to Marion as if time had indeed rolled back, and she was again at the beginning of life. But what a different beginning! Looking at the selfish and worldly spirit with which she had faced the world before, she could only thank God with wondering gratitude for the lesson He had taught so soon, and the rescue He had inspired.

When she found herself again in Claire's *salon*, with a strange sense of having been far away for a great length of time, one of the first people to congratulate her on the step she had taken was Brian Earle. He was astonished when Claire told him where Marion had gone, and he was more astonished now at the look on her face as she turned it to him. Although he could not define it, there was a withdrawal, an aloofness in that face which he had never seen there before. Nor was this an imagination on his part. Marion felt, with a sense of infinite relief, that she *had* been with-

drawn from the influence he unconsciously exerted upon her; that it was no longer painful to her to see him; that the higher feeling in which she had been absorbed had taken the sting out of the purely natural sentiment that had been a trouble to her. She felt a resignation to things as they were, for which she had vainly struggled before; and, even while she was withdrawn from Earle, felt a quietness so great that it amounted to pleasure in speaking to him.

“Yes,” she said, in answer to his congratulation, “I have certainly proved that all roads lead to Rome. No road could have seemed less likely to lead to Rome than the one I set out on; but here I am — safe in the spiritual city. It is a wonder to me even yet.”

“It is not so great a wonder to me,” he replied. “I thought even in Scarborough that you were very near it.”

She colored. The allusion to Scarborough made her realize how and why she had been near it then, but she recovered herself quickly. “In a certain sense I was always near it,” she said, quietly. “I never for a moment believed that any religion was true except the Catholic. But no one knows better than I do now what a wide difference there is between believing intellectually and acting practically. The grace of God is absolutely necessary for the latter, and why He should have given that grace to *me* I do not know.”

“It is difficult to tell why He should have given it to any of us,” observed Earle, touched and surprised more and more. Was this indeed the girl who had once seemed to him so worldly and so mercenary?

He could hardly credit the transformation that had taken place in her.

“I have never seen any one so changed as Miss Lynde,” he said later to Claire. “One can believe any change possible after seeing her.”

Claire smiled. “You will perhaps believe now that you only knew her superficially before,” she replied. “There is certainly a change—a great change—in her. But the possibility of the change was always there.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SOON after this Claire said to herself that if these two people were ever to be brought together again it could only be by her exertions. Left to themselves, it became more and more evident that such an event would never occur. And Claire had fully arrived at the conclusion that it would be the best thing which could occur; for she had no doubt of the genuineness of Marion's regard for Earle; and, while she recognized the attraction which she herself possessed for the latter, she believed that, underlying this, his love for Marion existed still.

“But, whether it does or not, his fancy for *me* can come to nothing,” she thought; “and the sooner he knows it, the better. I should be glad if he could know it at once. If such a thing must be stopped, there should be no delay in the matter.”

It was certainly no fault of Claire's that there was any delay. Earle's manner to herself rendered her so nervous, especially when Marion was present to witness it, that she could hardly control her inclination to take matters in her own hand, and utter some words which it would be contrary to all precedent for a woman to utter until she has been asked for them. But her eagerness to make herself under-

stood at last gave her the opportunity she so much desired.

One evening Earle inquired about a picture on which she was engaged, and of which he had seen the beginning in an open-air Campagna sketch. She replied that she was not succeeding with it as she had hoped to do; and when he asked if he might not be permitted to see it, she readily assented.

“For, you know, one is not always the best judge of one’s own work,” he remarked. “You may be discouraged without reason. I will give you a candid opinion as to the measure of your success.”

“If you will promise an altogether candid opinion, you may come,” she answered; “for you were present when I made the sketch, and so you can tell better than any one else if I have succeeded in any measure at all.”

“To-morrow, then,” he said,—“may I come to-morrow, and at what hour?”

Claire hesitated for a moment, and then named an hour late in the afternoon. “I shall not be at leisure before then,” she said.

She did not add what was in her thoughts — that at this hour she might see him alone, since Mrs. Kerr and Marion generally went out at that time to drive. It was, she knew, contrary to foreign custom for her to receive him in such a manner; but, strong in the integrity of her own purpose, she felt that foreign customs concerned her very little.

The next day, therefore, when Earle arrived, he was informed that the ladies were out, except Miss Alford, who was in her studio, and would receive him there. A little surprised but very much pleased by this, he

followed the servant to the room which Claire used as a studio when she was not studying in the galleries or in the studio of the artist who was her master.

It was a small apartment, altogether devoted to work, and without any of the decorations which make many studios show-rooms for bric-a-brac rather than places for labor. Here the easel was the chief article of furniture, and there was little else beside tables for paints and a few chairs. All was scrupulously clean, fresh and airy, however; and, with Claire's graceful figure in the midst, it seemed to Earle, as he entered, a very shrine of art — art in the noble simplicity which suits it best.

Claire, with her palette on her hand, was standing before the easel. She greeted him with a smile, and bade him come where he could command a good view of the painting. "Now be quite candid," she said; "for you know I do not care for compliments."

"And I hope you know that I never pay them — to you," he answered, as he obeyed her and stepped in front of the canvas.

It was a charming picture, a typical Campagna scene — a ruined mediæval fortress, in the lower story of which peasants had made their home, and round the door of which children were playing; a group of cattle drinking at a flag-grown pool; and, stretching far and wide, the solemn beauty of the great plain. The details were treated with great artistic skill, and the sentiment of the picture expressed admirably the wild, poetic desolation of this earth, "*fatiguée de gloire, qui semble dédaigner de produire.*"

"You have succeeded wonderfully," said Earle, after a pause of some length. "How can you doubt

it? Honestly, I did not expect to see anything half so beautiful. How admirably you have expressed the spirit of the Campagna!"

"Do you really think so?" asked Claire, coloring with pleasure. "Or, rather, I know that you would not say so if you did not think so, and therefore I am delighted to hear it. I wanted so much to express that spirit. It is what chiefly impresses me whenever I see the Campagna, and it is so impossible to put it in words."

"You have put it here," said Earle, with a gesture toward the canvas. "Never again doubt your ability to express anything that you like. You will be a great painter some day, Miss Alford; are you aware of that?"

She shook her head, and the flush of pleasure faded from her face as she turned her grave, gentle eyes to him. "No," she answered, quietly, "I do not think I shall ever be a great painter; and I will tell you why: it is because I do not think that art is my vocation — at least, not my *first* vocation."

"Not your first vocation to be an artist?" he said, in a tone of the greatest astonishment. "How can you think such a thing with the proof of your power before your eyes? Why, to doubt that you are an artist in every fibre of your being is equivalent to doubting that you exist."

"Not quite," she answered, smiling. "But indeed I do not doubt that I am an artist, and I used to believe that if I really could become one, and be successful in the exercise of art, I should be perfectly happy. Now I have already succeeded beyond my hopes. I cannot doubt but that those who tell me,

as you have just done, that I may be a painter in the truest sense if I continue to work, are right. And yet I repeat with the utmost seriousness that I do not think it is my vocation to remain in the world and devote myself to art."

Earle looked startled as a sudden glimpse of her meaning came to his mind. "What, then," he said, "do you believe to be your vocation?"

Claire looked away from him. She did not wish to see how hard the blow she must deliver would strike.

"I believe," she said, quietly, "that it is my vocation to enter the religious life. God has given me what I desired most in the world, but it does not satisfy me. My heart was left behind in the cloister, and day by day the desire grows upon me more strongly to return there."

"But you will not!" said Earle, almost violently. "It is impossible — it would be a sacrifice such as God never demands! Why should He have given you such great talent if He wished you to bury it in a cloister?"

"Perhaps that I might have something to offer to Him," answered Claire. "Otherwise I should have nothing, you know. But there can be no question of sacrifice when one is following the strongest inclination of one's heart."

"You do not know your own heart yet," said Earle. "You are following its first inclination without testing it. How could the peace and charm of the cloister fail to attract you — you who seem made for it? But —"

Claire's lifted hand stayed his words. "See," she said, "how you bear testimony to what I have

declared. If I 'seem made' for the cloister, what can that mean save that my place is there?"

"Then is there no place for pure and good and lovely people in the world?" asked Earle, conscious that his tongue had indeed betrayed him.

"Oh, yes!" she answered; "there are not only places, but there are also many duties for such people; and numbers of them are to be met on all sides. But there are also some souls whom God calls to serve Him in the silence and retirement of the cloister, who pine like homesick exiles in the world. Believe me I am one of those souls. I shrank from leaving the convent where I had been educated, to go out into the world; but I knew what everyone would say: that I was following a fancy — an untried fancy — if I stayed. So I went; and, as if to test me, everything that I desired has been given me, and given without the delays and disappointments that others have had to endure. The world has shown me only its fairest side, yet the call to something better and higher has daily grown stronger within me, until I have no longer any doubt but that it is God's will that I shall go."

Earle threw himself into a chair, and sat for a minute silent, like one stunned. He felt as if he had heard a death-warrant read — as if he was not only to be robbed individually, but the world was to be robbed of this lovely creature with her brilliant gift.

"What am I to say to you?" he cried at length, in a half-stifled voice. "This seems to me too horrible for belief. It is like suicide — the suicide of the faculties, the genius that God has given you, — of all the capabilities of your nature to enjoy, — of all the beauty, the happiness of life —"

He paused, for Claire was regarding him with a look of amazement and reproach. "You call yourself a Catholic," she said, "and yet you can speak in this way of a religious vocation!"

"I do not speak of religious vocations in general," he answered. "I only speak of yours. There are plenty of people who have nothing special to do in the world. Let *them* go to the cloister. But for you — you with your wonderful talent, your bright future — it is too terrible an idea to be entertained."

"Do you know," she said gravely, "that you not only shock, you disappoint me greatly? How can you be a Catholic and entertain such sentiments? — how can you think that only the useless, the worn-out, the disappointed people of this world are for God? I have been told that Protestants think such things as that, but they are surely strange for a Catholic to believe."

"I do not believe them," he said; "I am sure you know that. But when one is awfully shocked, one does not measure one's words. You do not realize how close this comes to me — how terrible the disappointment —"

She cut him short ruthlessly. "I realize," she said, with a sweet smile, "that you are very kind to have such a good opinion of me — to believe that the world will really sustain any loss when such an insignificant person as I leave it for the cloister."

"Insignificant!" he repeated, with something like a groan. "How little you know of yourself to think that! But tell me, is your mind unalterably made up to this step? — could *nothing* induce you to change it?"

Her eyes met his, steady and calm as stars. "Nothing," she answered, firmly but gently. "When God says, 'Come,' one must arise and go. There is no alternative. As a preparation, He fills one with such a distaste for the world, such a sense of the brevity and unsatisfactoriness of all earthly things, that they no longer have any power to attract."

"Not even human love?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

She shook her head. "Not when weighed against divine love," she answered.

In that answer everything was said, and a silence fell, in which Claire seemed to hear the beating of her heart. Would he be satisfied with this and go away without forcing her to be more explicit, or would he persist in laying on her one of the most painful necessities which can be laid upon a woman? As she waited with anxiety for the solution of this question, Earle was having something of a struggle with himself. The impulse was strong with him to declare unreservedly what he felt and what he had ventured to hope; but an instinct told him not only that it would be useless, but that he would inflict needless pain upon Claire, and mar their friendship by a memory of words that could serve no possible purpose. He knew that she understood him; he recognized the motive which had made her speak to him of a purpose that he felt sure had been spoken of to no other among her associates and friends; and he was strong enough to say to himself that he would keep silence — that she should know no more than she had already guessed of the pain which it cost him to hear her resolution.

When he presently looked at her, it was with a face

pale with feeling, but calm with the power of self-control. "Such a choice," he said, "it is not for me or for any other man to combat. I only venture to beg you not to act hastily. It would be terrible to take such a step and regret it."

Claire smiled almost as a cloistered nun might smile at such words. "Do you think that one ever takes such a step hastily? No: there is a long probation before me; and if I have spoken to you somewhat prematurely, it was only because I thought I should like you to know —"

"I understand," he said, as she hesitated. "It is well that I should know. Do not think that I am so dull as to mistake you in the least. I am honored by your confidence, and I shall remember it and you as long as I live. Now" — he rose — "I must bid you good-bye. I think of leaving Rome for a time. I have a friend in Naples who is urging me to join him in a journey to the East. Can I do anything for you in the Holy Land?"

"You can pray for me," said Claire; "and believe that wherever I may be I shall always pray for you."

"What better covenant could be made?" he asked, with a faint smile. And then, in order to preserve his composure, he took her hand, kissed it, and went hastily away.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AND so for Earle those Roman days ended, with the brief dream which he had indulged of finding in Claire's heart a response for the feeling that had arisen in his own. Yet no disappointment can be very keen when hope has not been very great, and Earle was well aware that he had never possessed any ground for hope. Kind and gentle as Claire had been, he was always conscious of something about her which seemed to set her at a remote distance,—an indefinable manner which had made him once call her "a vestal of art." He understood this now, but he had felt it before he understood it, and so the blow was not as heavy as it might have been if this underlying instinct had not existed. A vestal! — the expression had been well chosen; for there was indeed a vestal-like quality about her,—a vestal-like charm, which seemed to inspire thoughts of cloisteral tranquillity, and keep the fires of human passion at bay. This exquisite quality had been her chief attraction to Earle: its very unlikeness to the nature which had fascinated him, and from which he had recoiled, making its charm the greater; but even while it attracted, he had felt that it removed her from him and made hope wear the guise of presumption.

Now all hope was finally at an end; and, since it is in human nature to resign itself to the inevitable, the wound might be said to carry its own cure. Earle was aware of this, and he left Rome in no melodramatic spirit whatever; but feeling it best to go, in order to recover that calm and healthy control of himself and his own feelings which had been lacking with him since he first met Marion in Scarborough. As we know that nature abhors a vacuum, it is probable that his attachment to Claire arose partly from the disappointment of that prior attachment — from the need of the heart to put another object in the place of that which had been dethroned: but, leaving all analysis of the kind for the future, he quietly accepted the pain of the present and went away.

Marion had not the least doubt of the reason of his going, although no word fell from Claire on the subject. She said to herself that she was sorry — that she had hoped to know that Claire and himself were happy together, since they suited each other so well; but, although she was sincere in thinking this, there could be no doubt that, despite herself, she felt his departure to be a relief — that it relaxed a strain in which she held herself, — and that if a blank followed, a sense of peace, of release from painful conflict, also came. “I suffer through my own fault,” she reflected; “therefore it is quite right that I should suffer.” And such acceptance robbed the suffering of half its sting.

Two or three tranquil months followed — months during which the influences that surrounded her sank deep into Marion, and seemed to be moulding over again the passionate, impulsive nature. Claire was

one of the foremost of these influences, as Marion herself was well aware; and more than once she thought that she would be content if she might spend her life near the friend who had always seemed to her the voice of her better self. She had begun to study art—having a very fair talent,—and one day as she sat working at a study she said to Claire, who was painting busily on the other side of the room:—

“If I can ever grow to be anything of an artist, what a pleasure it will be for us to live and work together! I cannot think of anything I should prefer to that.”

Claire smiled a little. “Nevertheless,” she said, “there may be something that you will prefer as time goes on, although our association is very pleasant—as pleasant to me as to you.”

“Is there anything that *you* would prefer?” asked Marion; for something in the tone of the other struck her with surprise.

Claire did not answer for a moment. Then she said, quietly: “Yes. I must be frank with you. There is something I should prefer even to your companionship, even to art. I should prefer to go back to the convent that I have never ceased to regret.”

Marion’s brush dropped from her hand. She was astonished beyond measure, for it was the first intimation she had received of such a feeling on Claire’s part. “Go back to the convent,” she cried, “and give up you art!—Claire, are you mad?”

“Very sane, my dear,” answered Claire, smiling. “I have disliked to tell you about it, because I knew you would be sorry. I am sorry, too, that it should be necessary for us to part; but I grow daily more

certain that my vocation lies not in the world but in the cloister.”

“I am more than sorry—I am shocked!” said Marion. “With your talent!—why, all the artists whom we know say that your future is certain to be a brilliant one. And to bury that in a cloister!—Claire, it should not be allowed!”

-Claire remembered what other voice had said this, almost in the same words; but she was no more moved by it now than she had been then.

“Who should prevent it?” she asked. “If you, for instance, had the power, would you venture to prevent it—to say that any soul should serve the world instead of serving God?”

“That is not a fair way to put it. Cannot people serve God in the world as well as in the cloister?”

“Surely yes, if it is their vocation to do so. But if one has a vocation for the religious life—if that imperative call is heard, which cannot be realized except by those who hear it, bidding one arise and go forth,—then one *cannot* serve God as well in the world as in the cloister.”

“But, Claire, may you not imagine this call? I cannot believe that God would have given you such a talent if He had not meant you to make the most of it. Think how much good you might do if you remained in the world—how much money you might make, as well as how much fame you might win!”

“My dear,” said Claire, with gentle solemnity, “how much will either money or fame weigh in the scales of eternity? I want to work for eternity rather than for time; and I am, happily, free to do so—to go back to the cloister, where I left my heart.

Do not make it painful for me. Try to reconcile yourself to it, and to believe that God makes no mistakes."

"I cannot be reconciled," said Marion. "It is not only that I cannot bear to give you up — that I cannot bear for you to resign the success of which I have been proud in anticipation, — but I am selfish, too. I think of my own life. You are my one anchor in the world, and I have been happy in the thought of our living together, of our —"

Her voice broke down in tears. It was indeed a blow which fell more heavily than Claire had reckoned on. Feeling assured herself what would be the end for Marion, she overlooked the fact that Marion herself had no such assurance. In her disappointment and her friendlessness she had come to Claire as to a secure refuge, and lo! that refuge was now about to fail her. Emotion overpowered her — the strong emotion of a nature which rarely yields to it, — and for some minutes she was hardly conscious that Claire's tender arms were around her, and Claire's tender voice was bidding her take comfort and courage.

"I am not going to leave you immediately, nor even soon," that voice said; "and I should certainly not leave you, under any circumstances, until I saw you well placed and happy. Dear Marion, do not distress yourself. Let us leave things in God's hands. He will show us what is best."

"I am a wretch to distress *you*," said Marion, struggling with her tears. "But you must not believe me more selfish than I am. Do you think I should only miss you as a convenience of my life? No, it is *you*, Claire — your influence, yourself — that

I shall miss beyond all measure. No one in the world can take your place with me — no one!”

“But there may be a place as good for some one else to take,” said Claire. “Do not fear: the path will open before you. If we trust God He will certainly show us what to do. Trust Him, Marion, and try to be reconciled, will you not?”

“I will try,” Marion answered; “but I fear that I never can be. You see now, Claire, how strong a hold the world has on me. If I were good, if I were spiritual-minded, I should be glad for you to do this thing; but as it is, my whole feeling is one of vehement opposition.”

“That will not last,” said Claire. “I have seen it often, even in people whom you would have called very spiritual-minded; but it ended in the belief that whatever God wills is best. You will feel that, too, before long.”

Marion shook her head sadly, but she would not pain Claire by further words. She felt that her resolution was immovable, however long it might be before it was executed. “So there is nothing for me but to try to resign myself,” she thought. “I wish it were *my* vocation that I might go with her; for everything that I care for seems to slip from my grasp.”

Apart from resigning herself in feeling, there was also a practical side of the question which she was well aware must be considered. Where was she to go, with whom was she to live when Claire had left her, and, like a weary dove, flown back to cloister shades? She considered this question anxiously; and she had not arrived at any definite conclusion, when

one day a letter came which made her utter a cry of surprise and pleasure.

"This is from Helen," she said, meeting Claire's glance; "and what I hoped and expected has come to pass — she has promised to marry Mr. Singleton."

"Helen!" exclaimed Claire, in a tone of incredulity. "Why, I thought he wanted to marry you."

Marion laughed. "That was a mistake on his part," she said, "which fortunately did not impose upon me. Perhaps he was a little in love — the circumstances favored such a delusion, — but I am sure his ruling motive for asking me to marry him was to give me that share of the fortune which he could not induce me to take in any other way. I really did not suit him at all. I saw before I left that Helen *did* suit him, and I hoped for just what has come to pass. O Claire, you don't know how happy it makes me! For I feel now as if I had in a measure atoned to Helen for the pain I caused her about that wretched Rathborne."

"How?" asked Claire, smiling. "By making over Mr. Singleton and his fortune to her? But I am afraid you can scarcely credit yourself with having done that."

"Only indirectly, but it is certain that if I had accepted him he could not be engaged to her now. I am so glad — so very glad! He is really a good fellow, and Helen will be able to do a great deal with him."

"Is he a Catholic?"

"She says that he has just been received into the Church. But here is the letter. Read it for yourself. I think she is very happy."

Claire read the letter with interest, and when she had finished, returned it, saying, "Yes, I think she is certainly very happy. Dear Helen! how we always said that she was made for happiness! And now God seems to have given it to her in the form of great worldly prosperity — the very prosperity that *you* lost. Are not His ways strange to us?"

"This is not at all strange to me," replied Marion. "What I lost would have ruined me; what Helen has gained will have no effect upon her, except to make her more kind and more charitable. She is one of the people whom prosperity cannot harm. Therefore it is given her in full measure. But it certainly would have been singular if I could have foreseen that after I had gained my fortune it would pass into Helen's hands, and that by a simple process of retribution. For if matters had remained as they were between Rathborne and herself, there could have been no question of this. And they would have so remained but for me."

"You should be very grateful," said Claire, "that you have been allowed to atone so fully for a fault that you might have had to regret always. *Now* it can be forgotten. Helen says she will be married in April, does she not?"

Marion turned to the letter. "Yes, in April — just after Easter. 'Claire, let us beg her to come abroad for her wedding journey, and join us?'"

"With all my heart," said Claire. "They can come here for a little time, and then we can go with them to Switzerland, or the Italian lakes, or wherever they wish to go for the summer. It will be pleasant for us to be together once more — for the last time."

“ Claire, you break my heart when you talk so ! ”

“ Oh ! no,” said Claire, gently, “ I am very sure that I do not break your heart ; and if I sadden you a little, that is necessary ; but it will not last long. There is no need to think of it now, however ; only think that you and Helen and I will pass a few happy days together — for I suppose Mr. Singleton will not be much of a drawback — before we start on another and a different beginning of life from that on which we entered when we left our dear convent.”

EPILOGUE.

A YEAR from the summer day when three girls had stood together on the eve of parting in their convent school-room, the same three were seated together on the shores of the Lago di Como. The garden of the hotel in which they were staying extended to the verge of the lake, and they had found a lovely leafy nook, surrounded by oleander and myrtle, with an unobstructed view over the blue sparkling water and the beautiful shores, framed by mountains.

“A year ago to-day!” said Marion, meditatively, after a pause of some length. “Do you remember how we wondered when and where we should be together again? And here we are, with an experience behind us which is full of dramatic changes and full of instructions — at least for me.”

“Certainly for me also,” observed Helen. “Looking back on what I passed through, I realize clearly how foolish we are to regret the loss of things that seem to us desirable, but which God knows to be just the reverse. How miserable I was for a time! Yet that very misery was paving the way for my present happiness.”

“Very directly,” said Marion: “yet it is something

I do not like to think of; for it might all have ended so differently but for the mercy of God — and yours too, Helen. You deserve happiness, because you were so gentle and generous under unhappiness. As for me, I deserve nothing good, yet I have gained a great deal — the gift of faith, relief from self-reproach, and the great pleasure of being here with you and Claire.”

Claire looked at the speaker with a smile. “The pleasure of being together is one that we all share,” she said; “and also, I think, the sense of great gratitude to God. How much have I, for instance, to be grateful for — I who a year ago went forth into the world with so much reluctance — that the way has been made so clear to my feet; that I have now such a sense of peace, such a conviction of being in the right path!”

The others did not answer. It was hard for them — particularly hard for Marion — to give full sympathy on this point; for the pain of impending separation was hanging over them, and not even their recognition of the peace of which Claire spoke could make them altogether willing to see her pass out of their lives forever. There is the irrevocableness and therefore the pain of death in such partings, intensified by the fact that just in proportion as a character is fitted for the religious life does it possess the virtues to endear it most to those associated with it in the world. In such cases renunciation is not altogether on one side; and although Marion had struggled for the strength to make this renunciation, she could not yet control herself sufficiently to speak of it. Her own future looked very blank to her, although it had been

decided that she should remain with Helen, at least for a time, when Claire left them.

"I will stay with you until after your return to America," she had said to Helen when her plans were discussed; "but then I must find something to do—some occupation with which to fill my life."

Helen shook her head. "I am sure that George will never consent to that," she answered.

"And what has George to do with it?" asked Marion, amused by the calm, positive tone of Helen's speech. "I am really not aware that he has any control over me."

"Control—no," answered Helen; "but he feels that he owes you so much—the recovery of his father's fortune without any expense or division—that he is anxious to find something he can do for you, and he has said again and again how much he wished that you would allow him to make you independent."

"He could not make me independent of the need to fill my life with some work worth the doing," said Marion. "I do not yet perceive what it is to be, but no doubt I shall find out."

"Of course you will find out," said Claire, with her gentle, unquestioning faith. "God never fails to show the way to one who is willing to see it."

The way, however, had not yet been made clear to Marion as the three sat together on this anniversary of their first parting. She felt the difference between herself and her companions very keenly. To them life showed itself as a clear path, which they had only to follow to be certain that they were in the way of duty. All doubts and perplexities were at an end for them, whereas for her they seemed only beginning.

What, indeed, was she to do with her life? She could as yet see no answer to that question, and could only trust that in God's time the way would be made clear to her.

The silence after Claire's last speech lasted some time; for there seemed little to be said, though much to be felt, on the events of the past year. At length Helen observed, looking around toward the hotel, "How long George is in coming! He promised to follow us almost immediately, and I think we must have been here almost an hour."

"Oh! no," said Claire, smiling, "not so long as that. But certainly he has not fulfilled his promise of coming soon."

"And it is a pity," continued Helen; "for just now is the most delightful time to be on the water. I believe I will go and look for him. Will any one else come?"

Claire, who was always in readiness to do anything asked of her, assented and rose. But Marion kept her seat. "I think this is almost as pleasant as being on the water," she said. "But when you have found George, and he has found a boat, and all is in readiness, you may summon me. Meanwhile I am very comfortable where I am."

"We will summon you, then, when we are ready," said Helen. And the two walked away toward the hotel.

Marion, who had still, as of old, a great liking for solitude, settled herself, after the others left, in a corner of the bench on which they had been seated, and looked at the lovely scene before her eyes which saw its beauty as in a dream. She was living over her life

of the past year while she gazed at the distant, glittering Alpine summits; and although she had spoken truly in saying that she was deeply conscious of gratitude for many dangers escaped, and chiefly for the wonderful gift of faith, there nevertheless remained a sharp recollection of failure and pain dominating all her thoughts of the past.

Her face was very grave, therefore, and her brows knitted with an expression of thought or suffering, when a man presently came around a bend of the path, and paused an instant, unobserved, to regard her. He saw, or fancied that he saw, many changes in that face since it had fascinated him first; but they were not changes which detracted from its charm. The beauty was as striking as ever, but the expression had altered much. There was no longer a curve of disdain on the perfect lips, nor a light of mockery in the brilliant eyes. The countenance had softened even while it had grown more serious, and its intellectual character was more manifest than ever. These things struck Brian Earle during the minute in which he paused. Then, fearing to be observed, he came forward.

His step on the path roused Marion's attention, and, turning her eyes quickly from the distant scene, she was amazed to see before her the man who was just then most clearly in her thoughts.

Startled almost beyond the power of self-control, she said nothing. It was he who advanced and spoke. "Forgive me if I intrude, Miss Lynde — but I was told that I should find you here; and — and I hoped that you would not object to seeing me."

Marion, who had now recovered herself, held out her hand to meet his, saying, quietly, "Why should I

object? But it is a great surprise. I had no idea that you were in this part of the world at all."

"My arrival here is very recent," he said, sitting down beside her; "and you may fancy my surprise when, an hour after my arrival, I met George Singleton, and heard the extraordinary news of his marriage to your cousin."

"That must have astonished you very much. We first heard of it after you left Rome."

"It astonished me the more," he said with some hesitation, "because I had fancied it likely that in the end *you* would marry him."

"I!" she said, coloring quickly and vividly. Then after a moment she added, with a tinge of bitterness in her tone, "Such an idea was natural, perhaps, considering your opinion of me. But it was a great mistake."

"So I have learned," he answered. "But when you speak of my opinion of you, may I ask what you conceive it to be?"

"Is it necessary that we should discuss it?" she asked with a touch of her old haughtiness. "It is not of importance — to me."

"I am sure of that," he said, with something of humility. "But, believe me, your opinion of it is of importance to me. Therefore I should very much like to know what you believe that I think of you."

Her straight brows grew closer together. She spoke with the air of one who wishes to end a disagreeable subject. "This seems to me very unnecessary, Mr. Earle; but, since you insist, I suppose that you think me altogether mercenary and ready, if the opportunity

had been given me, to marry your cousin for his fortune."

"Thank you," he answered when she ceased speaking. "I am much obliged by your frankness. I feared that you did me just such injustice; and yet, Miss Lynde, how *can* you? In the first place, do you suppose that I am unaware that you gave his father's fortune intact to my cousin? And in the second place, have I not heard that you refused it when he offered it to you again, with himself? If I had ever fancied you mercenary, could I continue so to mistake you after hearing these things? But indeed I never did think you mercenary, not even in the days when we differed most on the question which finally divided us. I did not think *then* that you desired wealth for itself, or that you would have done anything unworthy to gain it; but I thought you exaggerated its value for the sake of the things it could purchase, and I believed then (what I *know* now) that you did injustice to the nobleness of your own nature in setting before yourself worldly prosperity as your ideal of happiness."

She shook her head a little sadly. "The less said of the nobleness of my nature the better," she answered; "but I soon found that the ideal was a very poor one, and one which could not satisfy me. I am glad your cousin came to claim that fortune, which might else have weighed me down with its responsibility to the end."

"And do you forgive me," he said, leaning toward her and lowering his voice, "for having refused that fortune?"

"Does it matter," she answered, somewhat nervously, "whether I forgive you or not? It would have

ended in the same way. You, too, would have had to give it up when your cousin appeared."

"But, putting that aside, can you not *now* realize a little better my motives, and forgive whatever seemed harsh or dictatorial in my conduct?"

Marion had grown very pale. "I have no right to judge your conduct," she said.

"You had a right then, and you exercised it severely. Perhaps I was too presumptuous, too decided in my opinion and refusal. I have thought so since, and I should like to hear you say that you forgive it."

"I cannot imagine," she said, with a marked lack of her usual self-possession, "why you should attach any importance to my forgiveness — granting that I have anything to forgive."

"Can you not? Then I will tell you why I attach importance to it. Because during these months of absence I have learned that my attachment to you is as great as it ever was — as great, do I say? Nay, it is much greater, since I know you better now, and the nobleness in which I formerly believed has been proved. I can hardly venture to hope for so much happiness, but if it is possible that you can think of me again, that you can forgive and trust me, I should try, by God's help, to deserve your trust better."

"Do not speak in that manner," said Marion, with trembling lips. "It is I who should ask forgiveness, if there is to be any question of it at all. But I thought you had forgotten me — it was surely natural enough, — and that when you went away it was because — on account of — Claire."

"You were right," he answered, quietly. "I meant

to tell you that. In the reaction of my disappointment about you, I thought of your friend; because I admired her so much, I fancied I was in love with her. But when she put an end to such fancies by telling me gently and kindly of her intention to enter the religious life, I learned my mistake. The thought of her passed away like a dream — like a shadow that has crossed a mirror, — and I found that you, Marion, had been in my heart all the time. I tested myself by absence, and I returned with the intention of seeking you wherever you were to be found, and asking you if there is no hope for me — no hope of winning your heart and your trust again.”

There was a moment's pause, and then she held out her hand to him.

“ You have never lost either,” she said.

(THE END.)

